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GUY DE MAUPASSANT

OUR HEARTS, THE LANCER'S WIFE,

AND OTHER STORIES

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OUR HEARTS

I

THE FIRST MEETING

ONE day Massival, the celebrated composer of "Rebecca," who had for fifteen years been called the "young and illustrious musician," said to his friend, André Mariolle:

"How is it that you have never yet been presented to Mme. Michèle de Burne? I assure you that she is one of the most interesting women of the Paris of to-day."

"Because I do not consider myself at all the kind of person to fit in with her clique."

"My dear boy, you are greatly mistaken. Her *salon* is extremely original, stimulating and artistic: one hears excellent music there, and the conversation would do credit to the most renowned *potinières* of the last century. You would meet with the utmost appreciation at Mme. de Burne's: for one reason because you play the violin so admirably, for another because you bear the reputation of being the opposite of commonplace, and, moreover, are chary of your society."

Flattered, but still holding back, believing also that the young hostess in question was not entirely unaware of this overture, Mariolle exclaimed:

"Pshaw! I do not feel at all inclined to go," but in such a manner that the indifference conveyed by the words was belied by an evident intention to consent. Massival went on:

"Let me take you there and present you to her one of these days. You already know her through hearing all of us talk of her, as we so frequently do. She is a remarkably bright and very pretty woman who, although only twenty-eight years of age, has foresworn matrimony, her first venture in that line having been so disastrous that she has resolved never to attempt another. Her salon is the rendezvous of agreeable men—not merely clubmen or society men—there are just enough of those to give it tone. I know she would be very glad to see you if I were to take you there."

Persuaded, Mariolle said: "All right then, one of these days."

A few days later the musician dropped in, saying:

"Are you engaged to dine anywhere to-morrow?"

"No, not exactly—but——"

"Then you must come to dinner at Mme. de Burne's. She has commissioned me to invite you, and I have, moreover, a note from her for you."

After a moment's hesitation for form's sake, Mariolle said:

"Very well, I'll go."

About twenty-seven years of age, a bachelor without profession, rich enough to take life as he pleased and to have travelled and accumulated a collection of modern paintings and antique trifles, André Mariolle bore the reputation of a man possessing a fine mind but a whimsical, capricious nature: one who posed as a recluse more from pride and reserve

than from timidity. With fine natural gifts, quick of apprehension and perhaps of accomplishment, he had through indolence contented himself with the rôle of an onlooker, or, perhaps, to speak more accurately, of an amateur. Had he been born poor he would doubtless have made his mark, but the proverbial golden spoon having been his, he was haunted by eternal self-reproach at having achieved nothing. It is true he had made several half-hearted attempts: one in the direction of literature when he published a volume of sketches in which he showed himself the possessor of a polished and spirited style; another in music, in performing on the violin, in which accomplishment he had acquired sufficient skill to elicit, even from professionals, a recognition of his having won a high place among amateurs; and lastly, one in sculpture, that art in which a clever knack in portraying striking figures replaces knowledge and study in the eyes of the ignorant. A fine horseman, he was also, report said, an expert fencer, but he refrained from exhibiting his dexterity in public; perhaps withheld from doing so by the same discretion that forbade his mingling in cliques where dangerous rivalry was to be encountered. Nevertheless, his friends extolled his abilities highly and sounded his praises with unanimity—it may be the more cordially because he never sought to eclipse them. All agreed that he was a trustworthy friend and a congenial companion. He was tall with a pointed beard; his hair was slightly grizzled but crisp and waving prettily, and he looked straight at you with a pair of bright, distrustful and rather dark eyes. His most intimate friends were the novelist, Gaston de Lamarthe; the composer, Massival; the

painters, Jobin, De Rivollet and De Maudel, who, one and all, appeared to value his friendship, his wit and even his judgment, while at the same time, with the vanity inseparable from men to whom success has undeniably come, they voted him in their hearts an amiable and decidedly intelligent failure.

His haughty reserve seemed to say: "I have achieved nothing, simply because I did not think it worth while to try." He desired to enter only those houses in which his solid but concealed gifts would be acknowledged.

The reason why he allowed himself to be so easily persuaded to go to Mme. de Burne's was because his best friends, those who industriously proclaimed his hidden talents, were the most intimate frequenters of her salon.

She lived in a pretty entresol, Rue du Général Foy, behind Saint Augustin. The dining-room and the general reception room looked on the street; two other rooms on a fine garden belonging to the proprietor of the house. One of these was the salon, a very large, long room with three windows opening on trees whose leaves rustled against the panes. This room contained exceptionally beautiful, though chastely simple furniture; all its belongings spoke of exquisite taste and unlimited expenditure—the chairs and tables, the dainty cabinets and étagères, the paintings, the porcelain figurines under glass shades, the vases, statuettes and the huge timepiece occupying the centre of a panel. All the decoration of this room attracted and detained the eye. In order to create this interior, of which she was almost as proud as of her own personality, Mme. de Burne had put in requisition the friendship, the knowledge,

the instinct for search of all the artists of her acquaintance. To please this woman, who was rich and paid lavishly, they had ransacked Paris for artistic furnishings and decorations, and the result was a salon renowned throughout the city and one which it was her joy to feel was more alluring than the conventional drawing-room of the ordinary woman of society. It was a favorite theory of hers that the easy comfort of luxurious seats, the perfect grace of outlines, the harmony of carefully blended shades of color held and captivated the incoming guest just as a pretty smile did. There are sympathetic and antipathetic interiors, she maintained; interiors, both rich and poor, that attract or repel the beings who enter them, make them gay or sad, stimulate or numb their faculties, warm or chill their hearts and inspire them with an intense desire either to remain or to depart. In the centre of this apartment a grand piano held the place of honor, dominating all. Farther on a high pair of folding doors led to a bedroom which again opened into a dressing-room hung with Persian curtains. In this room Mme. de Burne generally sat when alone.

Married to a well-bred scoundrel of polished manners, one of those domestic tyrants before whom all the women of their households are expected to bow and yield, she had for five years led a most wretched existence. For five years she had been forced to bear the exactions, the harshness, the jealousy, even the bodily violence of this despot. From the first days of their union the coarse brutality of his animal nature, unsoftened by even ordinary consideration or delicacy, had unspeakably revolted the woman who had become his prey. One night on his way home he

fell dead suddenly from the rupture of an aneurism. When she saw the form of her husband carried in, covered by a sheet, she gazed upon it, scarcely able to realize the full significance of this deliverance, filled with intense joy and at the same time experiencing a horrible dread of manifesting it. Of a gay and independent disposition, at times even exuberantly so, lively and magnetic with the spontaneous wit and brightness one sees so often in women born in Paris who seem to have absorbed into their being in infancy the pungent breath of the boulevards, laden with the applause or hisses issuing from the open doors of the playhouses, she, notwithstanding, retained from the five years of her captivity a singular timidity, a dread of saying too much or doing the wrong thing. Her husband, a polished man of the world, had trained her to receive his guests with mute correctness, an elegant, beautifully dressed slave. Among the tyrant's friends were many artists whom she had welcomed with curiosity and listened to with delight, never daring to show how fully she comprehended and appreciated their genius. Her days of conventional mourning over, she invited a few of these to dinner one evening. Two sent excuses, three accepted and met to their astonishment a young hostess with a candid soul and alluring manner who put them at their ease at once, declaring with frank grace how great had been her pleasure in meeting them in days gone by. Little by little she gleaned among the old-time acquaintances who had ignored and misunderstood her and ended by receiving, as an emancipated woman but one untouched by the faintest breath of slander, a few women and a number of men chosen from among

the most brilliant lights of Paris. The first-chosen became the intimate habitués; they brought others, and Mme. de Burne's salon grew to be a sort of little court where every guest possessed some claim to distinction—fame, genius or an ancient name—several old titles being always heard among the names announced at her gatherings.

Her father, M. de Pradon, who occupied the apartment immediately above hers, served her as chaperon. A beau of an earlier generation, elegant and courtly, he was all attention to the daughter whom he treated habitually as a grande dame, presiding at her Thursday dinners. These functions were celebrated throughout Paris and invitations thereto eagerly sought. The claims of all would-be guests were carefully discussed, and, as often as not, dismissed after consultation held among the inner circle. Witty sayings that had circulated at these dinners leaked out and were quoted in the city. Débuts of actors, artists and young poets took place under Mme. de Burne's roof, long-haired devotees of music, introduced by Gaston de Lamarthe, superseded the Hungarian violinists first brought by Massival, and exotic dancing girls exhibited their fantastic gyrations in her salon before appearing at l'Eden or the Folies-Bergère.

Mme. de Burne, besides being jealously guarded by her friends, had an unpleasant recollection of the world at large from the experience gained during her married life, and in consequence did not feel disposed to enalrge her circle of acquaintance to any very extended degree. Satisfied with her environment and fearing the tongue of scandal, she gave way with watchful prudence to a certain innate

tendency to bohemianism that was part of her nature. Anxious to preserve a spotless name, she curbed her penchant toward rashness, indulged only her most harmless whims and was careful not to give the slightest handle to those who would fain have suspected her of flirtation or intrigue. Many had besieged her heart, but no one so far, rumor said, had been rewarded with success. Men whispered this one to the other and with surprise, for few of the stronger sex have much faith in the virtue of an "unattached woman." Some said that the hateful recollection of her relations with her husband had cured her forever of any idea of listening to the voice of love. This was the preponderating opinion among the intimates, but the worldly wise Georges de Maltry laughed softly and announced: "Her time will come. It must come to a woman of that temperament; and the later it comes the more serious the affair will be. With her artistic bent, the probability is the man who awakens her heart will be a singer or a pianist."

Gaston de Lamarthe thought otherwise. In his character of novelist, observer and psychologist, making a specialty of studying people of the fashionable world, of whom he executed portraits both ironical and true to life, he professed above all to understand and analyze women with unique and infallible penetration. He classed Mme. de Burne with the eccentric beings depicted in his absorbing romance "One of Them." He was the first to portray that new type of woman, swayed by semi-hysterical nerves, torn by a thousand contradictory whims that did not rise to the dignity of wishes, losing all illusions, yet having tasted no real joys, thanks to the

trend of modern conditions and to the accident of circumstances, who without ardor in any direction, without enthusiasms, seem to combine the caprices of children with the exhausted vitality of old cynics.

He, among others, had been an unsuccessful aspirant. All the faithful intimates had become, one after another, épris of Mme. de Burne, and, the attack over, had remained still under her sway, though in different degrees. As time went on they seemed to form themselves into a little coterie of worshippers. She was their madonna, of whom they among themselves constantly thought and spoke, unable, even when absent from her, to throw off her power. They praised her, boasted of her, criticised her or depreciated her according to the way they felt she was treating them at the moment. Sensitively jealous of her and to some extent spying upon one another, they were careful to exclude from her new acquaintance any man who might prove a dangerous rival. There were seven of these devoted followers: Massival, Gaston de Lamarthe, the portly Fresnel and that combination of philosopher and ultra-fashionable young society man, M. Georges de Maltry, renowned for his paradoxes, his elaborate, eloquent, up-to-date erudition, incomprehensible to even his most ardent admirers, and even more celebrated for his taste in dress, as recherché as his theories; besides these chosen spirits, a few men of title, said to be also men of some degree of wit, the Comte de Marantin, the Baron de Gravil and two or three others also offered incense at the shrine.

The two privileged members of this band of the élite appeared to be Massival and Lamarthe, who seemed to possess the knack of being always able to

amuse the young woman by their bohemian free and easiness, their chatter, their skill in taking everybody off—even their liege lady herself, when she would permit it. But the care which she took never to manifest to any one of her admirers a prolonged or marked predilection, her bright, coquettish manner toward each, and the perfectly impartial distribution of her favors among the members of the band, maintained among them a friendship spiced with hostility and an ardor of spirit that made the situation a most amusing one to watch.

Now and again one of them, to play a trick on the rest, would introduce a newcomer. But as this newcomer was never a very striking or interesting figure, the others were seldom perturbed by the incident. This was the way in which André Mariolle had been brought to visit Mme. de Burne.

A footman garbed in black announced the names:

"Monsieur Massival."

"Monsieur Mariolle."

Under the light of a lamp formed of a high column of gilded bronze dominated by a huge shade of crushed old rose silk, a woman's head and three men's heads were bending over an album which Lamarthe had just brought in. The novelist was turning the pages and explaining the pictures.

One of the heads turned, and, Mariolle coming forward, saw a bright, blond face with fluffy curls at the temples that seemed to glow like brushwood on fire. The delicate retroussé nose gave animation to the face, the clearly cut mouth, the dimpled cheeks, the slightly prominent chin, gave an expression almost of mockery, but the eyes, light blue, with great, dilated pupils, were tinged with melancholy.

This singular and brilliant look of the eyes suggested dreams produced by morphine, or, perhaps, merely a coquettish application of belladonna.

Mme. de Burne rose, and, holding out her hand, welcomed the newcomer: "I have been a long time begging our friends to bring you to see me," she said. "But I always have to ask for such things to be done several times before they happen."

She was tall, graceful, leisurely in her movements, slightly décolleté, showing scarcely the tips of her superb shoulders glowing pinky in the light of the lamp. Her hair was not red, but that indescribable color certain leaves take on when burned by the sun in autumn. She presented Mariolle to her father, who bowed and offered his hand. The men chatted familiarly among themselves in three groups, seeming perfectly at home, just as if they were in a sort of club, but where the presence of a woman compelled a certain gentleness of manner.

The portly Fresnel was talking with the Comte de Marantin. The assiduous visits of Fresnel to this house and the evident affection he felt for Mme. de Burne often irritated and even angered his friends. Still young, but fat as an alderman, puffy, almost clean shaven, his head covered by a thin coating of downy, light hair, he was common and tedious, and it was patent to all that he had assuredly but one feature to invest him with interest in the eyes of the young woman—one that would render him still more unattractive to other eyes—the fact that he loved her with infatuation, loved her with a blind, senseless intensity. He had been nicknamed "the seal." He was a married man, but he had never introduced his wife to Mme. Burne. Rumor said that she was very

jealous of the young widow. Lamarthe and Massival particularly were indignant at the cordiality she manifested toward their puffy rival, and, when they could not refrain from expressing their reprobation, she would say, smiling:

"I love him just as I should a good, faithful spaniel."

Georges de Maltry and Gaston de Lamarthe were talking over the latest, as yet uncertain, discovery in regard to micro-biology. M. de Maltry advanced his theory on the subject with subtlety and depth of knowledge and the novelst accepted it with the eagerness with which men of letters generally welcome anything original and novel. The expositor of the beau-monde was fair, the flaxen type of fairness, slight and tall. He wore a coat fitting him tightly over the hips, and his clever-looking head, with its smooth, pale hair, so smooth that it looked as if it had been pasted down, rose above his white collar and tie. As to Lamarthe, Gaston de Lamarthe (the "de" had inoculated him with a few pretensions in the direction of aristocracy and "high-life"), he was nothing if not a man of letters, a pitiless and terrible man of letters. Gifted with an eye that took in faces, attitudes, gestures with the precision of a camera, and endowed with a penetration and sense of romance as thoroughly a part of his make-up as is the scent in a hunting dog, he harvested from morning till night material for his work. With a wonderful grasp of the visible and an instinctive intuition revealing to him that which was hidden from others, he created books that seemed like extracts from human life, so vivid was their color, their tone, their action. The appearance of each of his novels

convulsed society with agitation, conjectures, mirth and vexation, for people guessed at the thinly masked characters, and his passage through a salon invariably left a crowd of perturbed persons in its wake. He had published a volume of reminiscences in which many men and women of his acquaintance had been portrayed, not exactly spitefully, but with an accuracy, an incisiveness that tortured the originals. Some one had nicknamed him "Save me from my friends." With an inscrutable nature and a reticent tongue, he was said to have been at one time deeply in love with a woman who had flouted his love; on her account he had avenged himself on all other women.

Massival and he were thoroughly congenial, although the nature of the musician was a very different one—franker, more expansive, less susceptible, perhaps, but more apparently sensitive. After producing two great successes, a piece played in Brussels, then presented in Paris, where it had been received with acclamation at the Opéra-Comique, and a second work accepted at once at the Grand Opéra, and welcomed as the announcement of a new star rising in the musical world, he had then experienced that sort of check that seems to occur to so many artists of to-day, seeming almost like a kind of premature paralysis. They do not grow old, mantled in glory and success, like their fathers, but seem stricken with loss of power in the flower of their age. Lamarthe used to say: "Nowadays, we in France have nothing but great men who have become fiascos!" Massival, about this time, seemed extremely épris of Mme. de Burne, and the coterie was gossiping about it; therefore every eye was

turned on him when he kissed her hand with a look of adoration. He asked:

"Are we late?" She replied:

"No. I am still expecting the Baron de Gravil and the Marquise de Bratiane."

"The marquise! What luck! Then we shall have some music to-night?"

"I hope so."

The tardy pair entered. The marquise, who, on account of a tendency to embonpoint, appeared short, was of Italian birth, lively, with black eyes, eyelashes and eyebrows, and thick black hair that almost covered her forehead and even threatened her eyes. She was said to possess one of the most remarkable voices to be heard among women of society. The baron, a well-bred man, with a narrow chest and huge head, was incomplete without his violoncello in his hands. A passionate melomaniac, he was never seen except at houses where music was a chief element in the entertainment.

Dinner was announced, and Mme. de Burne, taking the arm of André Mariolle, allowed her guests to precede them. When all had left the salon and they were alone, at the moment when they were about to follow, she shot at him an oblique, lightning flash out of her pale, large-pupilled eyes—a look in which he discovered a more vivid interest than is usually manifested in the expression of pretty young hostesses who are receiving a young man on the occasion of his first visit.

The dinner was dull and monotonous. Lamarthe, nervous and preoccupied, seemed hostile to everybody; not openly hostile, for he plumed himself upon his good breeding, but inspired by that almost

imperceptible ill-humor that at once lowers the social thermometer at any gathering. Massival, absent-minded also, ate little and looked furtively from time to time at the mistress of the house, who seemed inattentive, smiled in answer to remarks, then became instantly serious, her mind apparently dwelling on matters that interested her far more than did her friends. Notwithstanding, she did her duty amply as a hostess toward the marquise and Mariolle, but she did it mechanically and from a sense of propriety, her mind evidently far from herself and her surroundings. Fresnel and M. de Maltry were at odds over contemporary poetry. Fresnel possessed on the subject of poetry the superficial ideas of the ordinary man of the world, while M. de Maltry had a very different point of view.

Several times during dinner Mariolle again encountered that singular glance from his hostess, but each time less intense, less inquisitive. Among the guests only the Marquise de Bratiane, the Comte de Marantin and the Baron de Gravil seemed to be in their usual vein; these three chattered unceasingly, discussing a variety of topics.

The dinner over, Massival, more and more depressed, sat down at the piano and sounded a few notes. Mme. de Burne at once awoke from her revery and organized a little concert composed of the pieces she enjoyed the most. The marquise was in good voice, and, stimulated by the presence of Massival, sang like a true artist. The composer accompanied her with the melancholy face that he always saw fit to assume when playing. His hair, which he wore long, came over his coat collar and touched his silky beard. Many women had loved

him, and he was still pursued by the homage of some, it was whispered. Mme. de Burne, seated near the piano, listening with all her soul, appeared at the same time to be looking at him and not to see him. Mariolle felt a little jealous: he was not jealous particularly in regard to Massival and his hostess, but beholding this rapt expression of a pretty woman fixed upon an illustrious man, he felt his vanity humiliated. This was by no means the first time he had suffered through contact with successful men at the hands of women whose favor was for many the supreme recompense.

About ten o'clock three other guests came, the Baronne de Frémines and two wealthy Jewesses. Conversation ran on an engagement just announced and a divorce that seemed imminent.

Mariolle surveyed Mme. de Burne sitting now under a lamp held aloft by a column. Her nose, slightly tip-tilted, the dimples in her cheeks and the dainty cleft in her chin gave her face a charming, infantile gaicty, although she was approaching her thirtieth year, and although the flower-like bloom of her youth had passed and a sort of haunting look of mystery had taken its place. Under the flooding radiance of the great lamp her skin took on the peculiar shading of pale velvet and her hair glistened with tawny lights whenever she moved her head. She felt Mariolle's gaze, fixed upon her as it was from the other end of the salon, and, rising after a moment or two, she glided toward him, smiling, as if in answer to a summons.

"I'm sure you are feeling bored, monsieur," she said. "One always feels so in a house where one is not acclimatized."

He protested the reverse, of course. She took a chair next to him and immediately they began to talk. There was no hesitation, no check. It was like a match held to very dry wood; at once the flame answered. It was as if they had always known each other's opinions and sensations, as if the same nature, the same tendencies and tastes had predisposed them to understand each other and that destiny had ordained that they should meet. Perhaps some adroitness on the young woman's part contributed to bring about this state of feeling, but the delight of finding some one who listened, who grasped his meaning at once, who furnished him opportunities for repartee by her replies, inspired Mariolle. Flattered also by the manner in which he had been treated by her, captivated by the alluring grace and charm with which she knew so well how to fascinate men, he revealed that subtle wit and delicate quality of mind peculiar to him, which when perceived attracted sympathy in a powerful degree.

All at once she exclaimed:

"It is really very enjoyable to converse with you, monsieur. I had been told that it was, indeed."

He felt himself blushing and said boldly:

"While I had heard, madame, that you were——"

"A coquette," she broke in. "Well, so I am with people who please me. Everybody knows it, and I do not deny the fact; but you will find out that my coquetry is thoroughly impartial. I thus succeed in keeping my friends always about me."

She said this with a look that signified "Do not be a simpleton; keep your head; do not make the mistake of thinking you will be accorded more than others have won from me."

"You are warning me of the dangers that will beset my path here," he answered. "Thank you, madame. I am pleased at that."

She had opened to him an opportunity of speaking to her personally, and he availed himself of it. He proceeded to pay her compliments and discovered that she enjoyed this. Then he piqued her curiosity by telling her what he had heard said of her mode of life and tastes in the different sets he frequented. Although she affected a profound indifference, she could not conceal her desire to listen. He flatteringly depicted a woman of independent spirit, bright and intellectual, who had surrounded herself with men of eminence and who yet remained an accomplished and fascinating woman of society. She protested with smiles, with faint denials, highly amused by all the details he furnished, and, with an appearance of indulging in badinage, she led him on to say more and more, questioning him wittily with an eager desire for flattery.

"She is, after all, just like all the rest," he mused, looking at her; "nothing but a mere child," and then he uttered a pretty compliment vaunting her genuine love of art, so rarely found in a woman. An unexpected shade of mockery, of that French raillery that is the essence of our race, instantly was visible in her face. Mariolle had overdone it. She showed him that she was not duped.

"Dear me," she remarked, "I really must confess that I do not feel perfectly sure whether it is art or artists that I am fond of."

"How can one love the artists without loving art?" retorted Mariolle.

"Because they are sometimes more amusing than men of society."

"Yes, but they have more inconvenient foibles."

"That's true."

"Then you do not care for music?"

She grew serious at once.

"Oh, but I do. I adore music. I think I love it better than anything else, although Massival maintains that I do not understand it."

"He said so?"

"No, but he thinks so."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, we women guess intuitively almost all that we do not know for a certainty."

"So Massival thinks that you cannot grasp music?"

"I am sure of it. I gather it by the manner alone with which he interprets it to me and the modulations, as though he were thinking: 'This is a useless piece of work, but I'll do it for you because you are a nice woman.'"

"Nevertheless, he told me that better music is heard at your house than anywhere else in Paris."

"That is true, thanks to him."

"Don't you care for literature?"

"Of course I do, and I even have the presumption to imagine that I can appreciate good literature, in spite of Lamarthe's dictum."

"Does he also think you cannot appreciate that?"

"Of course he does."

"You don't mean to say that he told you so."

"He certainly did. His theory is that, although there are to be found now and then women who have a delicate and true perception of expressed sentiments, of psychology in general, the sex is, as a

whole, incapable of discerning that which is superior in his calling."

Mariolle smiled and asked: "What is your opinion on the matter, madame?"

She reflected some moments, then looking him squarely in the face to see if he were listening carefully and grasping what she answered:

"I have my own ideas on the subject," she said. "I believe that women's capacity for feeling—feeling, I say—makes their minds able to apprehend everything; only their minds do not always retain the matter grasped. Do you understand me?"

"No, not at all, madame."

"I mean by that, that in order for us to grasp anything as fully as men do, our womanly nature must be appealed to, rather than our intelligence. We cannot feel interested in any subject presented to us by a man unless he first gains our sympathy, for we see everything through a haze of sentiment. By sentiment I do not mean love—no—through a haze of sentiment: and sentiment takes on all sorts of forms, manifestations and shades. It is something belonging specially to us. You men cannot understand it in the very least: it befogs you, while it illuminates us. Oh! I know that this is all very vague to you: so much the worse! To sum it up, if a man loves us and we care for him—this is indispensable—and if this man is a superior being he can, if he takes the trouble, make us feel, see, apprehend everything—everything; and we can, at times and in fragments, share his intellect. But this is only evanescent, for we forget—yes, we forget, just as the air forgets the words it has carried. We are intuitive and inspirational, but variable, impressionable,

influenced by that which is about us. If you only knew how I recognize in my own self conditions of mind that make of me several different women, according to the weather, my state of health, what I have been reading, what people have been saying to me! There are days when I possess the soul of a blameless mother of a family—without children—and others in which my soul is almost that of a cocotte—without lovers."

Charmed, he asked:

"Do you believe that most intelligent women are capable of this mental activity?"

"Yes," she replied, "only it is dormant, almost always; and, besides, the existence custom has ordained for them forces them in different directions and determines matters for them."

"You prefer music, then, to all other arts, you say?"

"Yes. But what I have been telling you is so true! Never could I have enjoyed it as I have, never should I have adored it as I have, had it not been for that marvellous Massival. All those wonderful works of the great masters that I had heretofore passionately loved, why, he put a soul into them for me when he showed me how to interpret them. What a pity it is that he is married!"

She spoke enthusiastically, but at the same time with such profound regret that she completely corroborated her theories in regard to women and their admiration for art.

Massival was in fact a married man. He had contracted a union before his days of success, but he never spoke of his wife and she never accom-

panied him anywhere, and, although he had three children, the fact was known to but few.

Mariolle began to laugh. She was undeniably attractive, this woman, piquante, different from the conventional type and very pretty. He persisted in gazing with a pertinacity which did not appear to annoy her at that face both grave and gay, a little defiant, with its audacious nose, its sensuous bloom, flushed by the glorious summer of a maturity so fine, so tender, so delicious that she seemed to be at the year, the month, the very minute of her perfection. He asked himself: "Is she painted, I wonder?" and he searched for the little tell-tale line at the roots of the hair, but without discovering it. Heavy steps behind him on the carpet startled him and he turned his head. Two footmen were carrying in the tea-table. The little blue-flamed lamp made the water murmur softly in a great silver apparatus, shining and complicated as a chemist's apparatus.

"You will take a cup of tea?" she asked.

He said he would. She rose and walked erect, almost stiffly, toward the table where the singing vapor ascended in the midst of an array of cakes, preserved fruits and bonbons. Her silhouette clearly defined against the tapestry of the salon, Mariolle observed the slenderness of her waist and the slimness of her hips, also the beauty of the shoulders and full throat that had struck him earlier.

As he watched her trailing her skirt along the carpet he said to himself: "A siren! Everything about her is alluring!" She now went from one to the other, offering refreshments with dainty grace. Mariolle was following her with his eyes and La-

marthe, who was walking up and down with his cup and saucer in his hands, came to him and said:

"Shall we leave together?"

"Certainly."

"Let us go at once, if it is the same to you. I am tired."

They left. When they had reached the street the novelist said:

"Are you going home or to the club?"

"I am going to the club for an hour or two."

"To the 'Tambourines'?"

"Yes."

"I'll go to the door with you, but I won't go in. I always feel bored in places of that sort."

When they had gone several steps Mariolle said:

"What a peculiar woman! What do you think of her?"

Lamarthe laughed out.

"Aha! it is beginning!" he said. "You are catching it like all the rest of us; as to me, I am cured, but I have had the disease. The symptoms, my friend, consist in talking of her, nothing but her when the patients are together, whenever and wherever they meet."

"It strikes me that there is nothing surprising in my speaking of her, seeing that this is the first time we have met."

"All right. Let us talk of her. You are going to fall in love with her. It is inevitable; every one goes through it."

"She is so very bewitching?"

"Yes and no. Those who admire the women of yesterday, soulful women, women with heart and sensibility, the women one reads of in old novels,

loathe her and get to detest her so much that they end by saying terrible things about her. Others, such as ourselves, to whom the modern woman appeals, are forced to confess that she is exquisite, although we do not become attached to her. This is exactly what always happens. Men do not die of love for her; they do not even suffer excessively, but they feel furious that she is not different. You will be stricken if she vouchsafes to cast the spell; indeed, I see that the charm is already beginning to work."

"Oh, I am simply the latest comer; besides, I fancy she is fond of titles."

"Yes, she certainly is not indifferent to them, and yet at the same time she laughs at them. The most famous, recherché, even the most distinguished man will not return very often to her house, if he has not found favor in her sight; and yet she is fond of that idiot of a Fresnel and that slimy De Maltry. She becomes greatly attached to blockheads without the slightest reason for doing so; it is impossible to guess why, unless it be because they amuse her more than we do—or, perhaps, because that, at heart, they love her better than we do, and all women are more swayed by that consideration than by any other."

Lamarthe went on talking about her, analyzing her character, arguing with himself, repeating at times to contradict what he had said, interrogated by Mariolle, who listened and answered with deep interest, fascinated by the subject, a little misled, perhaps, his mind full of accurate observations and false deductions.

He said: "She is not the only one; there are fifty

like her, if not more, nowadays. For instance, that little Frémines woman, whom we saw enter her house a minute ago, is another of the same kind, only bolder and married to a foreigner. Her house is one of the most amusing places to visit in Paris. I drop in there quite often."

Without perceiving how far they were wandering, they had followed the Boulevard Malesherbes, the Rue Royale, the Avenue of the Champs Elysées and were arriving at the Arc de Triomphe. Lamarthe suddenly drew out his watch:

"My dear boy," said he, "we have now been an hour and ten minutes talking about her; quite enough for to-day. I'll walk with you as far as your club another time. Go home and go to bed, and I'll do the same."

II

THE NET IS SPREAD

Mme. de Burne's dressing-room was a large, well-lighted apartment hung with beautiful Persian draperies imported for her by a friend, a diplomat. Their ground was yellow, a yellow like golden cream, and the design, which was in all colors, yellow predominating, consisted of bizarre-looking houses with turned-up roofs around which huge-maned lions and long-horned antelopes roamed, interspersed by gorgeous birds of paradise on the wing.

There was little furniture. Three long tables covered with plaques of green marble bore all the requi-

sites for the toilet of a woman. On the central one were the great washbasins of heavy crystal, on the second an army of bottles, boxes and vases of all shapes, surmounted by silver tops on which were displayed a monogram and crown. On the third table were spread all the complicated and delicate instruments that modern luxury has devised for the care of the person. Besides these tables the only other pieces of furniture were two chaises-longues, luxuriously upholstered, inviting in appearance to the possessor of tired limbs. Along an entire wall was an immense mirror formed of three panels with hinges, permitting the young woman to see herself from all points of view. To the right, in a niche usually hidden by a drapery, was a bath, a deep, green marble basin into which one descended by means of two steps. An exquisite cupid, designed by the sculptor Predole, sitting on the edge, poured in hot or cold water from the two shells with which he was playing. At the end of this retreat Venetian mirrors in the form of an arched alcove reflected the bath and the bather. A little farther on stood a desk covered with papers—letters folded up, scraps of torn envelopes bearing gilded monograms. This was where Mme. de Burne did her writing, for she lived much in this room when alone.

Day dreaming after her bath, lying back in a chaise-longue, her heavy bronze-brown hair twisted up on the top of her head, her firm, supple arms shining in the loose sleeves of her dressing-gown, she was disturbed by a soft knock at the door. Her maid entered, leaving a letter. Mme. de Burne opened it, and, having read the first few lines, dis-

missed the servant, saying: "I shall ring for you in an hour."

When she was alone she smiled with victorious joy. The opening words had sufficed to show her that this letter was the capitulation of Mariolle. He had resisted much longer than she had deemed possible. During the last three months she had lured him on with all the grace, the winning charm that she was capable of. Never before had she made such efforts to captivate. He seemed distrustful, on his guard against the wiles of her insatiable coquetry. There had been many *tête-à-tête* conversations, during which she had put forth all her physical allurement, all her seductive wit and many musical soirées to which they had listened together, vibrating with the same emotion, before she had been able to detect in his eye the avowal of surrender, the supplication of a soul that is vanquished. How well she knew that look! How often had she, with feline skill and unquenchable curiosity, awakened that torturing fire in the eyes of men! It amused her so to see them give in, little by little, conquered, dominated by her power, to find herself becoming the one woman on earth in their eyes, their capricious and tyrannous idol! This feeling had risen in her gradually, like an instinct developing itself, a natural instinct for war and conquest. It may have been that a germ of longing for reprisals had been planted in her heart during the years of her matrimonial bondage, a sort of vague desire to avenge herself for what she was undergoing at the hands of one man by making all others that came within her reach suffer also. She was, above all, a coquette, and as soon as she had gained

her freedom she set to work to hunt for and subdue those susceptible to her charms, just as a hunter goes out in search of game, for the mere pleasure of seeing it fall. Her heart was not eager for emotion, as are the hearts of tender, sentimental women; she did not crave the exclusive love of one man nor did she seek happiness in reciprocal passion. All she wanted from those about her was admiration, homage, worship and incense. Whoever became one of the habitués of her salon had to become also the slave of her sorceries; and no one could inspire her for any length of time with interest if he refused to be conquered by her coquetries, disdainful of love or perhaps worshipping elsewhere. In order to keep her friendship, it was necessary to be her captive; and in that case she lavished countless kindnesses and attentions so as to retain her prisoner. Once enrolled among her troop of adorers, a man seemed to belong to her by right of conquest. She governed her captives with wonderful skill, guided by her knowledge of their defects and virtues and by the turn their jealousy took. Too exacting admirers were punished by expulsion, and when, grown wiser, they demanded readmission, she would generally grant the boon, imposing, however, severe conditions. She took so much pleasure in this game of pitch and toss with men's hearts that she found it as interesting to bewitch old men as to turn the heads of young ones. It almost seemed as if her own degree of affection were regulated by the intensity of that which she inspired, the dull and heavy Fresnel retaining his place as a prime favorite, thanks to the frenzied passion he felt for her. She was not, however, entirely indifferent to men: she had been con-

scious of the beginning of impulses known only to herself that she had checked just at the moment when they might have become dangerous. Artists particularly, whose refinements of thought and subtleties of feeling she was able to comprehend, had several times agitated the surface of her heart, but, a prey to prudent fears, undecided and watchful, she had always drawn back in time. In addition to her natural caution, she saw her satellites through the eyes of the modern woman, who in a very short time denudes the greatest man of his prestige. As soon as, épris of her, they threw themselves on her mercy, they became divested of the glamour that had given them any charm in her sight, and she saw them henceforth, like all the others who had preceded them, in the guise of poor wretches who had been subjugated by her arts.

In spite of all this, she was a victim to boredom. She did not really enjoy society and only went into it through precedent. She endured the long evenings with suppressed yawns and sleepy eyelids, amused only by the mannerisms, the affectations, by her own caprices and the gratification of her restless curiosity. Never able to find relief in a real affection, she lived in a sort of gay ennui, always on the search for distraction and already weighed down by lassitude, although she deemed herself satisfied with life. What really caused her poignant satisfaction was her estimation of herself as the most seductive and eagerly sought-for woman of her time. Proud of her charm, of her irregular, bizarre and captivating order of beauty, certain of the keenness of her intelligence, which enabled her to guess, forestall and comprehend thousands of

matters that others could not perceive, of her wit that so many talented men had appreciated, and ignorant of the limits that bounded her mental powers, she believed herself an almost unique being, a rare pearl existing in a mediocre world, a world that seemed to her empty and monotonous because she was too good for it. Never did she suspect for a moment that she was herself the cause of the continual ennui from which she suffered: she accused others of being the source of her melancholy. If they were not able to distract or amuse or even inspire her with passion, it was because they were lacking in pleasing qualities. She would say laughingly: "Everybody is wearisome. The only tolerable people are those that can amuse me and simply because they can amuse me."

And the best way to please her was to succumb to her charm. Showing well that the only way to succeed in anything is to take pains, she bent all her intelligence in the direction of allurement, and nothing delighted her so much as to recognize the homage of a passion-kindled eye or wildly beating heart. She had been astounded at the difficulty encountered in the subjugation of André Mariolle, for it had been patent from the first moment that he admired her. Little by little she had succeeded in sounding that secretly envious, subtle and egotistical nature, and, laying herself out to vanquish him by peculiar attentions and preferences, aided by a natural sympathy she really felt, she had ended by attaining her end. For more than a month she had watched him, perceiving him restless, taciturn, fighting against the impulse to make the avowal. Oh, those avowals! In her heart she did not enjoy them

so very much, for when they were too direct, too eager, she was forced to be cruel and rigorous. What she liked best were delicate manifestations, semi-confidences, warily expressed allusions; and she displayed marvellous tact and address in compelling from her adorers this reserve in their worship of her. For more than a month had she been awaiting from Mariolle the confession, open or ambiguous, according to the nature of the owner, by which the oppressed heart solaces itself. He had said nothing, but he had written. It was a long letter—four pages! She held it in her hands, trembling with gratification, for a moment, then, throwing herself back in her chaise-longue and dropping off her little slippers so as to be more fully at ease, she began to read. A surprise awaited her. Mariolle told her in serious words that he refused to suffer at her hands; that he already knew her too well to consent to be enrolled among her victims. In polished phraseology, through which, however, one could detect the love he was controlling, he wrote that he was aware of her manner of treating those who had grown to love her; he confessed that he had fallen under her spell, but that he meant to escape by flight from the thraldom that menaced him. He was going away. The letter was a determined and eloquent farewell.

She read and reread with ever-increasing surprise those four pages of prose. Getting up from her seat, she put on her slippers and began to pace up and down, her sleeves thrown back, displaying her bare arms, her hands thrust into the little pockets of her dressing-gown, one of them clutching the

crumpled letter. Stunned by this unexpected turn of affairs, she said to herself:

"He writes remarkably well, this boy; better than Lamarthe. There is sincerity, real feeling in this; not mere sentimentality."

Feeling inclined to smoke, she went up to the table with the array of silver-crested bottles and, selecting a Dresden box, took out a cigarette; then, having lit it, she walked over to the mirror, where she saw three pretty women appear in the three divisions. As she got quite close, she stopped short, made a slight bow and smile, a friendly little salute that meant "Very pretty—very pretty!" She inspected her eyes, bared her teeth, raised her arms, placed her hands on her hips and turned her profile so as to see herself from head to foot in the three mirrors. Remaining thus, gazing at the triple reflection of herself, she found the picture altogether charming; and enraptured at being so beautiful, she felt an egotistical and physical pleasure in it, almost as sensuous as that of a man.

Every day she was accustomed to survey herself in this manner, and her maid, who occasionally surprised her, said once to her: "Madame looks at herself so much that she will end by wearing out all the mirrors in the house." But this self-admiration was the secret of her empire over those with whom she came in contact. By cultivating to their utmost the beauty of her face and the elegance of her form, by seeking and finding out all that could possibly enhance her physical advantages, by studying the almost imperceptible movements and shades of expression that would develop the natural grace of her attitudes and gait and increase the strange attrac-

tiveness of her eyes, by learning what made her more beautiful in her own eyes, she found out how to intensify the alluring power over man that was hers by birthright.

A little tired soon, by standing still in this manner, she said to her ever-smiling image (and the image moved its lips as if in echo): "All right! We'll see, monsieur!" Then, crossing the room, she sat down at her desk.

This is what she wrote:

DEAR M. MARIOLLE: Come and see me to-morrow at four. I shall be alone, and I hope that I shall be able to reassure you as to the imaginary dangers that you dread. I call myself your friend, and I shall prove myself a sincere one.
MICHELE DE BURNE.

It was a simple toilet that she wore to receive her visitor next day, a gown of pale gray, gray with a tinge of lilac as melancholy as the twilight, very plainly made, with a high, closely fitting collar, tight sleeves, a bodice that clung to her throat and waist, and a skirt that fitted closely to her hips. When he entered, looking slightly grave, she went toward him, holding out her hands. He kissed them, then sat down, and she waited, allowing the silence that followed to last some moments, in order to assure herself of his embarrassment. He did not know what to say and waited for her to speak. At last:

"Well, let us look the matter in the face!" she exclaimed. "What has come over you? Do you know that you have written me a very insolent letter?"

"I know I have," he replied, "and I apologize to you. I am, I always have been, excessively, brutally frank. I might have gone away without making the

uncalled-for and wounding explanations that I addressed to you. But I thought it more loyal to follow the dictates of my nature and to trust to your comprehending it."

"Come, come!" she broke in. "What folly is this?"

He said impetuously:

"I would rather not discuss the matter."

"But I brought you here to discuss it," she interrupted quickly in her turn, "and we shall do so until you are quite convinced that you are running no risk."

She broke into a peal of laughter, laughter like that of a very young girl, and her simple gown, so like that of a convent girl, made the laugh seem all the more natural.

"I wrote you the truth, the absolute truth," he stammered, "the simple truth about myself."

"I know it," she answered, becoming serious. "This happens with all my friends. You wrote that I am an abominable coquette. I know that I am, but what then? No one dies in consequence; I don't believe that any one even suffers. Of course there is what Lamarthe calls 'the crisis.' That is what you are undergoing now, but it soon passes, and then comes—what shall I call it?—a sort of chronic condition which does not cause pain and which I just keep alive so that I may retain the fidelity, devotion and attachment of my friends. Now what do you think of me? Am I not candid and sincere? How many women have you met who would dare to say to a man what I have just said to you?"

She spoke with a quaint and determined air and with such simplicity and yet earnestness that he

could not help smiling. "All your other friends," said he, "are men who have already passed through the fire, even before meeting you. Scorched and grilled, they were able to bear with equanimity the furnace in which you placed them; but as far as I am concerned, madame, I have never been through that ordeal. And I have for some time past realized that it will be terrible if I allow myself to yield to the feeling that is developing in my heart."

She became familiar in her manner suddenly, and bending toward him, her hands crossed upon her knees, she said:

"Now, listen! I am speaking in all good faith. I hate to think that I am going to lose a friend simply on account of a chimerical fear. Supposing you should love me; the men of the present day do not love the women of this period so intensely as to suffer any harm from it. Believe me, I am speaking of what I know well."

She remained silent a moment and then went on with the peculiar smile of a woman who is speaking the truth, but who believes she is lying:

"At any rate, I am not the sort of woman to be adored passionately. I am too modern. I shall be your friend, your pretty little friend, for whom you will feel affection—but nothing more than affection —I shall see to that."

Then, in a more serious tone, she added:

"In any case, I warn you that I am incapable of really loving any one, no matter whom; that I shall treat you just like the others, never any better. I have a horror of jealous men and tyrants. I was compelled to endure the despotism of a husband, but I do not care, with a mere friend, to put up with the

affectionate tyranny which mars cordial relations. You see, I am hiding nothing from you, that I speak to you as a comrade. Do you accept the rôle of a loyal friend that I propose to you? If not, it is not too late: you can withdraw, whatever be the gravity of your case. There is safety in flight, you know."

He looked at her, already won by the magic of her voice, by the intoxication of her personality. He murmured, vibrating with a sense of her proximity:

"I accept the conditions, madame; and if harm comes, so much the worse for me. You are worth running the risk for."

She stopped him as he was going to say more:

"No, that is enough," she said. "Let us never mention this again."

She went on to chat on indifferent matters. An hour later he left in torture, for he really loved her, and with joy in his heart because he had promised her that he would not withdraw.

III

QUESTIONINGS

He was in torture because he loved her. Unlike the vulgar crowd to whom the chosen one of their heart appears surrounded by an aureole of perfection, he had grown to love her, although watching her with the clear-seeing eyes of a man who had never before known what love is. His unquiet, penetrating mind, always on the defensive, had pre-

served him from the influence of turbulent passions. A few intrigues, two short liaisons cut short by ennui, and some successful love-passages, soon ended in disgust—such had been the romantic experiences of Mariolle. He considered woman as a useful institution for such men as required a well-kept house and children or as a pleasant toy for such as desired the pastime of love-making.

In going to Mme. de Burne's he had been warned against her by the confidences of his friends. What he knew of her interested, puzzled and attracted him, while at the same time it rather repelled him.

On principle he disapproved of players who did not play the game. After a few interviews he discovered that she was extremely interesting and invested with strong magnetic charm. The physical personality of this fair woman, who was at the same time plump and slim, with her superb arms, that looked as if made for embraces, and her long, slender body, that seemed made for flight, appeared to him a symbol of vain hopes. Moreover, he had experienced in his intercourse with her a pleasure he never could have believed possible in conversing with a mere society woman. Endowed with wit marked by spontaneity and unexpectedness, satirical with an irony that did not sting, she at times allowed herself to be influenced by romantic and even sentimental considerations, showing that beneath her mocking brilliancy there existed a fund of poetic tenderness, and this touch of inconsistency made her very captivating.

She made herself exceedingly agreeable to Mariolle, desiring to add him to her list of victims; and he visited her as often as he could, feeling attracted

by her more and more as time went on. A sort of power seemed to emanate from her, drawing him to her: a power made up of smiles, glances and words; and yet he often went from her presence with a feeling of irritation at something she had said or done. The more he felt himself enveloped by this mysterious magnetism, the more he fathomed and comprehended her nature, ardently wishing she were different. Still the very characteristics that he disliked in her were the ones that allured him more effectively than her better qualities. Her coquetry, as openly carried on as the toying with a fan by other women, her way of taking nothing seriously which had at first attracted, but now made him uneasy, her constant longing for excitement and novelty, at times exasperated him so much that he would, on leaving her, resolve to discontinue his visits gradually. But the next day he would inevitably find some pretext to return to her. What he felt more and more acutely as his infatuation increased was the insecurity of her affection and the reality of his suffering. He sank deeper and deeper in his obsession, lik a man drowning from fatigue, whose boat has foundered far from shore. He was not blind; he knew her exactly as she was, the prescience of his passion having endowed him with clear-sightedness. Still he could not keep himself from constantly thinking about her.

With tireless persistency he kept analyzing her character, seeking to penetrate the depths of that inscrutable feminine soul, that incomprehensible mixture of gay intelligence and triviality, of affection and inconstancy, of judgment and childishness, that astounding blend of contradictory traits.

How was it that she maintained this empire over him? He asked himself this question over and over again. He could not understand how, for with his reflective, observant and proudly modest nature it was to have been expected that he would have been attracted by a woman with the old-fashioned virtues of tender gentleness and faithful affection. But he encountered in this one a kind of new departure from the old order of things, a being excitingly original, one of those women who are the pioneers of a new generation, essentially different from their predecessors, and who diffuse around them, even by their faults, the powerful attraction of a newly awakening force. After the dreamy and passionate women of the Restoration came the pleasure-loving daughters of the Empire—and here was another type of the protean yet eternal feminine, a creature of refined sensibility, of restless, irresolute nature, who gave the idea of having been under the influence of all the narcotics that soothe or madden the nervous centres—under chloroform that stuns, under ether and morphine that lash the imagination, blunt the intelligence and dull the emotions. He saw in her a being created to charm; a gem, exquisite and delicate, satisfying his eye, making his heart throb, exciting his longings—just as delicious and appetizing viands exhibited behind a plate-glass window tantalize the hunger of a starving passer-by.

Perceiving that he was falling down the slope of an abyss, he began to reflect with terror on his situation. What would happen? What would she do? She would do precisely as she had done with all the rest—bring him to that condition in which a man obeys the caprices of a woman slavishly, as a

dog follows the steps of his master, and then she would catalogue him in the list of her more or less valued favorites. But had she really treated all the others in this way? Had there never been an exception for whom she had truly cared for a month, a day, an hour, in one of those transports, so quickly repressed, to which her soul was subject?

He discussed her interminably with these others as they came away together from her dinners. He could see that they were still agitated, discontented, nervous—their emotions unsatisfied. No, she had certainly never loved any of those drawing-room celebrities; therefore he, he who had never done aught to cause people to turn their heads or stare when he entered a salon or mingled in a crowd—what would he be in her eyes? Nothing—a mere nonentity, one who in the eyes of a brilliant woman becomes a sort of tame cat: an adjunct, useful and without flavor, like the vin ordinaire one uses with water at meals. If he had made himself a name he might have accepted this rôle; his renown would have made it less humiliating; but, as it was, he would have none of it, and so he sent her the letter of adieu. When he received her brief reply he was as overwhelmed as if some great boon had been accorded him, and when she made him promise that he would not forsake her, he was as happy as if he had been delivered from some peril.

Several days passed without anything occurring. But when the calm—the lull that follows a storm—was over he felt, awakening in intensified violence, the passion that was devouring him. He had said that he would never again broach the subject to her; but he had not promised never to write, and one eve-

ning, when he was kept from sleep by the insomnia of a lover, he sat down, almost in defiance of himself, and began to commit to paper an expression of his sufferings. It was not a letter; it was a collection of disjointed notes and phrases—throes of anguish transmuted into words. This soothed him: he felt relieved, and going to bed, found he was able to sleep.

Next morning he read over what he had written, and putting the sheets of paper in an envelope, posted them to Mme. de Burne. He fancied that this document would not displease her: all women regard a sincere love-letter with favor and infinite indulgence. Toward evening he went to her house, wondering how he would be received and what she would say to him. He found M. de Pradon there, smoking cigarettes and chatting with his daughter. Sometimes he passed hours in this way, for he treated her less like a child than a friend. She had introduced into their friendship a tinge of the homage which she exacted from him as she did from everybody else.

When she saw Mariolle come in a flash of pleasure illumined her face; she held out her hand eagerly and her smile said: "I am glad to see you!"

He hoped that the father would soon take his leave. But M. de Pradon did not go. In spite of his confidence in his daughter, he always watched her with a singular anxiety that was almost marital. This time he was inspired with curiosity to see how this new friend of hers would succeed; whether he was likely to have more luck than the others, what he was like, if he amounted to anything. Would he get his congé or would he become a member of the

band of intimates? So he stayed on, and Mariolle soon realized that there was no hope of his departure. He decided, therefore, to make a friend of him, judging wisely that an ally in the camp might prove a useful auxiliary.

So he laid himself out to be agreeable, and succeeded in being gay and amusing, exhibiting none of the symptoms of an unhappy lover. Mme. de Burne said to herself: "He is a clever fellow and acts comedy to perfection." And M. de Pradon thought: "Now, this is a level-headed young man; my daughter does not make a fool of him as she does so many of the others." So when Mariolle saw fit to take his leave, he left them both delighted with him.

But he came out of that house in deep distress of mind. While with this woman he realized the hold she had upon him, he felt that he should knock in vain at that heart, like a prisoner beating his fists in despair upon an iron door. He was most irretrievably enmeshed—there was no use in trying to escape from her; so, recognizing the futility of flight, he made up his mind to be wary, patient, cunning, tenacious: to conquer this woman by means of skill, by that homage for which she had so insatiable a longing, by the adoration that delighted her soul and by the voluntary servitude that she had reduced him to. His letter had pleased her. He would write again. He did write. Almost every night, on getting home, at the hour when the mind, excited by the events of the day, sees everything in an exaggerated form, he sat down at his writing-table and began to think of her. The super-excited ardor of his mind and his overwrought imagination sent forth words like sparks from a fire. Almost

daily he wrote letters that seemed to consume his own heart, so intense was the fervor they breathed: for passionate letters of this kind are often more dangerous to the composer than to the recipient.

By working himself up to this state of effervescence, by exciting his brain with words and dwelling constantly upon one unchanging theme, he grew to lose, little by little, the notion of reality in connection with this woman. Ceasing to see her as she had appeared to him at first, he ended by being able to see her only through the medium of his pen; and what he wrote night after night became to him a series of truths. This daily labor of idealization held her up to him in the guise in which she had appeared in his dreams of what she ought to be. His former resistance also fell before the evident affection that Mme. de Burne now showed him: for at this time, although no word had passed between them, there was no doubt that she preferred him to any other and openly manifested her favor.

He thought with a sort of ecstasy of hope that she might end by loving him some day. She was influenced in a peculiar manner by the power of his letters. Never had any one offered such worship and adulation as were conveyed in them and at the same time maintained the reserved attitude of Marielle. Never had any of her adorers conceived this delicious idea of sending up to her bedside every morning by her maid, on a silver salver, this heavenly breakfast of sentiment in a paper envelope. What made it more effective was that he never mentioned the letters, seemed to ignore them, and remained to all appearance the most self-contained of her admirers, making no allusion to this daily

torrent of adoration. She had, of course, received letters of this nature from others, but in quite another tone—more pressing, more audacious. For three months, the duration of the "crisis," Lamarthe had sent her a series of them, the clever, caressing love-letters of a literary man truly épris, the series ending only when he realized the hopelessness of his suit.

Mariolle's differed from Lamarthe's in their concentration of feeling, their sincerity of expression, their submission and devotion, and Mme. de Burne read them with a pleasure that no other writings had ever given her. Her friendship for him deepened, and she showed him increasing favor the more she perceived his absolute discretion. She keenly relished the originality of the situation. Up to this time she had been able, in spite of her vanity, to discern rival preoccupations in all the hearts disturbed by her; she had never reigned absolutely; there had always been chambers where she could not enter. Jealous of music with Massival, of literature with Lamarthe, she now met for the first time a being to whom she was all in all. The portly Fresnel had assuredly loved her as devotedly, but then he was the portly Fresnel. She felt a kind of selfish gratitude to Mariolle for according her this triumph. A wish for his constant presence now began to beset her, a desire for his regard, his complete subjugation. Although he did not offer her the flattery that others tendered her, he flattered her more by indirect means, by ministering to the attributes that govern the heart and spirit of a coquette —her pride of conquest and her desire for mastery. Like a monarch annexing a new country, she en-

croached upon his life by a series of small invasions day by day, organizing fêtes, theatre parties, restaurant dinners; she dragged him at her chariot wheels continually, no longer able to exist without him, or, rather, without the incense of the vassalage to which he was reduced.

He submitted, happy in his captivity, caressed by her eyes, her voice, her caprices. Life now to him was one long transport of intoxicating desire.

IV

AVRANCHES

Mariolle had just come and was waiting for Mme. de Burne, who had not yet returned, although she had sent him a despatch that morning asking him to call.

In that salon he always felt, despite his desire to be there and his keen appreciation of all that was beautiful in it, a sort of enervation and oppression that prevented him from sitting down and feeling at ease when his hostess was not present. He walked up and down in blissful expectation, tempered by a dread that some unforeseen obstacle should prevent her arrival and so postpone their meeting till the next day. When he heard the wheels of a carriage stop at the door, he quivered with hope that became certainty when the apartment bell sounded.

She came in, with her hat on her head, an unusual thing for her to do, and looked joyful and hurried.

"I have a piece of news for you," she announced. "I am going away to the country."

His face fell.

"Oh! And you tell me a thing like that as if it were good news!"

"Yes. Sit down and I'll tell you all about it. You may or you may not know that M. Valsaci, my mother's brother, is a civil engineer and bridge builder and has a place at Avranches. He spends a great part of his time there, with his wife and children. Every summer we go and visit them there. Now, this summer I did not care to go, and this vexed him and he made a fuss about it to papa. Apropos of this, I must tell you that papa is jealous of you, and is always telling me that I am compromising myself with you. I'm afraid that you'll have to come here less often, but don't worry over this—I shall arrange matters. Well, to resume, papa gave me a scolding and made me promise to go to Avranches for ten or twelve days. We're going to leave on Tuesday morning. What do you say to this?"

"I say that you are breaking my heart."

"Is that all?"

"Well, what can I say or do? I can't prevent you from going."

"You don't see anything that can be done? Well, I do. Avranches is very near Mont St. Michel. Have you ever been to Mont St. Michel?"

"No, madame."

"Very well. Next Friday you will become inspired with a desire to behold that marvel. On your way you will stop at Avranches, say on Saturday, and about sundown you will be walking up and down

in the public gardens that overlook the bay. We shall meet by chance. Papa will be very angry, but that does not matter. I will get up a party to go the next day to visit the Abbey—all of us together. You must be enthusiastic over the idea and make yourself extremely agreeable, as you are an adept at doing when you wish. You must make a favorable impression on my aunt and invite us all to dinner at the hotel. We will all stay there that night, and you can return next day via St. Malo. Eight days later I shall be back in Paris. Is not this a fine plan? Am I not nice to you?"

He murmured:

"You are what I love best on earth!"

"Hush!" she exclaimed.

For several moments they stood gazing at each other. She smiled up at him—a smile of sincere gratitude and sympathy, and he looked down with eyes that devoured her; he wanted to fall at her feet and roll there, to bite the hem of her skirt, to shout aloud: he yearned to express to her the passion that tortured him from his heels to his head, his soul as well as his body. He felt horribly sad because he could not avow to her his love, his inexpressible and delicious love. She knew all about it, though, without his expressing it, just as a good marksman knows when his bullet has hit the bull's eye. There was not a fibre in that man's frame that did not vibrate at her bidding; he was more her possession than she herself was. So she felt glad and said to herself that he was charming.

"Then it's all arranged—we'll make the expedition?" she asked good-humoredly,

"Yes, madame—it's all arranged," he answered,

his voice husky with emotion. After a moment's pause she said: "I mustn't detain you any longer to-day. I just came in to tell you about this, as we are leaving the day after to-morrow. I shall be engaged all day to-morrow and I have still four or five calls to pay to-day before dinner."

He rose at once, his heart heavy, for his one desire was never to leave her. He kissed her hand and took his leave.

Four long days followed, days which he passed alone, preferring silence to voices, solitude to his friends. On Saturday morning he took the eight o'clock express. He had scarcely slept, feverish with the expectation of the journey. His dark, silent room, in which the only sound heard was that of the rolling by of fiacres, oppressed him like a prison.

As soon as the first light filtered through his curtains he jumped out of bed and scanned the sky—fears of bad weather had been haunting him. The sky promised a fine day. A light mist floated, presaging heat. He dressed much sooner than was necessary, being ready two hours too soon, chafing with impatience to be out of the house and on his way. He sent his servant to fetch a cab before his toilet was completed, dreading his not being able to find one. The first jolting of the vehicle filled him with satisfaction, but when he entered the Montparnasse station he was disgusted to find that he had fifty minutes to wait. Finding an empty carriage, he paid for the whole of it, so that he might dream undisturbed by fellow passengers. As soon as he felt the train gliding out with soft, even motion, his impatience, instead of being allayed, became more intense, and he felt an insane impulse to accelerate

its pace by pushing on the cushioned partition in front of him. When Argentan was passed the verdure of the Norman landscape attracted him. The train was passing through an undulating country, with fertile valleys in which the peasants' habitations, their pastures and orchards were enclosed by rows of great trees whose tufted heads shone in the rays of the sun. It was toward the end of July, the season during which this part of France is at the height of its vitality and bloom.

In all the fields separated by those leafy walls enormous oxen, cows with glaring patches of white in vague, bizarre designs on their flanks, reddish bulls, with big, curly foreheads, looking fierce and aggressive, succeeded each other indefinitely as the train rushed along this fresh, rich country, whose soil seemed to exude cider and beeves. Here and there a river would be seen winding along at the foot of poplars under a thin veil of willows or a stream would flash out from the grass, disappearing to show itself again unexpectedly a few moments later. Mariolle was distracted from his impatience by this rapid and continuous panorama of a lovely park diversified by orchards and herds. But when he had changed train at Folligny the overmastering desire to arrive took possession of him again, and during the last forty minutes he looked at his watch at least twenty times. At last he beheld, perched on a hill they were approaching, the city where she was awaiting him. The train was late, and only an hour separated him from the moment when they were to meet by chance on the public promenade.

As he alighted from the train he found an omnibus standing in readiness. It began to climb slowly

the steep road leading to Avranches, which occupies the summit of a hill, and from a distance has rather the appearance of a fortress. Nearer it is seen to be an ancient and pretty Norman town, with small, regular houses, almost all alike, crowded one against the other, with a look of ancient pride and modest ease, a countrified and mediæval air.

As soon as Mariolle had thrown his suit case into his bedroom at the hotel he asked to be shown the street leading to the botanical gardens. He hurried along it, although he was too early, trusting that some happy accident might have caused her to arrive before the time. But as soon as he reached the gate he perceived that the gardens were almost empty. Three old men were walking up and down, old shopkeepers, natives evidently, who no doubt came every day to spend their evenings there together, and a family of English boys and girls, with long legs like colts, were playing around a blonde nursery governess who seemed to be day-dreaming. Mariolle, with beating heart, walked on, scrutinizing every alley as he came to it. He reached a wide avenue lined with leafy trees that seemed to stretch across the gardens, dividing them into two parts. Passing through this, he approached a terrace that faced the horizon and was completely carried away by what he beheld.

At the foot of the hill on whose summit he was standing spread an apparently interminable plain of sand which merged itself in the distance into the sea and the sky. A river meandered along this plain, and here and there under the flaming light of the sun pools of water diversified the sand like luminous plates of burnished metal. In the middle of the vast expanse of sand, still moist with the receding tide,

there arose, twelve or fifteen kilometers from the shore, a monumental crag, surmounted by a cathedral. In all those immense dunes it had but one neighbor, Tombelaine, on a rock with its rounded back, squatting amid its quicksands. Farther in the distance, on the surface of the shimmering water, could be discerned the tops of submerged rocks; and, the eye pursuing to the right its journey, discovered at the edge of the sandy waste the vast green extent of Norman country, so covered with trees that it looked like an illimitable forest. This scene at one glance revealed Nature under two aspects—one of grandeur and sublimity, the other of freshness and grace, and one's gaze turned from this vision of forests to the vision of the granite mount with its wonderful Gothic structure, the lonely inhabitant of these limitless sands.

Mariolle had before now thrilled under the strange surprises that foreign lands offer to travellers, but this time the shock was so sudden that he stood rooted to the spot, his soul awed and softened. After some moments the clanging of a bell called him back to things mundane and to the feeling of happy expectancy that now animated him.

The gardens were almost always empty. The three old gentlemen still promenaded the paths, but the English children had disappeared. Mariolle began to walk up and down. She would soon be here now; he would see her at the end of one of the paths leading to the wonderful terrace. What bliss! He felt her close at hand, somewhere near, not to be found or seen yet, but thinking of him, knowing that they would meet soon. He almost uttered a cry. A blue sunshade was visible among the trees. That

was she—he knew. A little boy appeared, trundling a hoop in front of him, then two ladies, next two men, M. de Pradon and another. She was all in blue, a blue like the sky in spring. He recognized her, although he could not distinguish her features. He did not dare to go forward and meet her, knowing he would blush and stammer, that he could not satisfactorily explain this accidental meeting under the cold, suspicious eye of M. de Pradon. Still he walked on, his eyeglass raised to scan the horizon. As he approached them she called out, not even taking the trouble to feign surprise at this rencontre: "How do you do, M. de Mariolle! Isn't the view superb?"

Bewildered by this greeting, scarcely knowing what part to play, he stammered:

"Ah! is that you, madame? What a fortunate accident! I wished to see this admirable country, and so——"

"And so you chose the very time when I was here! How very nice of you!" and then she proceeded to introduce her friends to each other.

"One of my great friends, M. de Mariolle—my aunt, Mme. Valsaci; my uncle, the bridge builder."

She contrived that he should walk between herself and her aunt; then, shooting at him a very rapid glance, asked:

"What do you think of this part of the country?"

"I don't think I ever saw anything more beautiful," he answered.

"Oh, but if you had been here as long as I have you would realize how this place influences you! The going out and coming in of the sea on those sands, that restless movement that never ceases, bathing the whole expanse twice a day and so quickly

that a galloping horse cannot escape from it. This wonderful sight that is free to all moves me inexpressibly; really, I am quite carried away by it. Am I not, aunt?"

Mme. Valsaci, a ladylike woman of mature years, with silvery hair, the wife of a civil engineer of good standing, acknowledged that she had never seen her niece so moved by anything before. Then she added, after reflection:

"It is not surprising, though, when one remembers that she scarcely ever sees or admires any scenery except that at the theatres."

"But I go to Dieppe and Trouville almost every year!"

The elder lady laughed:

"One goes to Dieppe and Trouville just to meet one's friends. The sea is placed there simply for bathers who make rendezvous."

This was said very ingenuously, perhaps without any arrière-pensée. They returned to the terrace: it drew their steps irresistibly—in spite of themselves they always found that they were heading toward it, just as balls roll down a slope. The descending sun was weaving a curtain of transparent cloth of gold behind the silhouette of the Abbey, which grew darker and darker, looking like a gigantic reliquary under a golden veil. But Mariolle saw nothing except the adorable, blonde face enveloped in a cloud of blue at his side. She was changed, somehow, yet never had he seen her look so deliciously fresh and radiant, with a freshness that seemed to pervade her eyes, her hair, her entire body and even her soul; a freshness drawn from this lovely country, its sky, its clear light and verdure. Never had he felt he loved

her so deeply. He walked on beside her, finding nothing to say. The contact of her dress, the occasional jostling of her arm against his, the eloquent interchange of glances annihilated him completely, just as if they had deprived him of his personality. He felt himself becoming destroyed by the proximity of this woman, absorbed by her until there remained nothing of himself—nothing but a longing, an appeal and adoration. She had done away with his former self, just as she would have reduced a letter to thin ashes in the flames.

She was fully aware of this complete victory, and touched by it, vibrating and tender, more alive to all emotional influences in this vital air so full of the sea and the sap of the land, she said, without looking at him:

"I am so glad to see you!" Then added immediately: "How long are you going to stay?"

"Two days—counting to-day as one."

Then, turning to the aunt, he said: "Will you and M. Valsaci do me the honor to come and spend the day with me to-morrow at Mont St. Michel?"

Mme. de Burne answered for her relative:

"I shan't allow her to refuse—since we have been so lucky as to meet you here." The engineer's wife added:

"Yes, monsieur, we shall be very pleased to go, provided you come and take dinner with us this evening."

He bowed and accepted. Suddenly he became conscious of a delirious joy, a joy like that that takes possession of one on receiving news of a great piece of good fortune, ardently longed for. But what had he obtained? What important event had occurred in

his life? None. And yet he felt himself carried away by this intoxication of an indefinable presentiment. They promenaded for a long time on the terrace, waiting to see the sun go down, to gaze until the last moment at the silhouette of the Mont projected against the fiery horizon. They chatted now on ordinary topics, such as could be discussed in the presence of a third person, from time to time exchanging stolen glances. Then, the sun disappearing, they wended their way to the villa of the Valsacis, situated in the suburbs and surrounded by beautiful grounds overlooking the bay.

Desiring to be prudent, and worried, moreover, by the cold and almost hostile attitude of M. de Pradon, Mariolle left early. When he was bending over the hand of Mme. de Burne to kiss it in parting salutation, she murmured with a peculiar intonation: "À demain—à demain!"

Immediately after his departure, M. and Mme. Valsaci, who kept early hours, proposed that all should go to bed.

"You go," said Mme. de Burne. "As for me, I shall go and take a turn in the garden."

"I shall too," remarked her father.

She went out wrapped in a shawl, and they began to walk up and down the white sand of the garden paths, which, in the bright moonlight, looked like little rivers meandering between the turf and flower beds. After a long silence M. de Pradon said in a low tone:

"My dear child, you will do me the justice to allow that I have never troubled you with any advice."

She had felt it coming, and was ready with an answer:

"I beg pardon, papa. You did once give me a piece of advice."

"I?"

"Yes, you. And very bad advice it was. Therefore I am fully determined, if you ever give me any more, not to follow it."

"What advice did I ever give you?"

"You advised me to marry M. de Burne. That was a piece of advice that proved to be wanting in judgment, clear-sightedness and in knowledge of men in general and of your daughter in particular."

He kept silence for some minutes, rather surprised and embarrassed, then:

"Yes, I made a mistake that time," he acknowledged. "But I am quite sure that I am making no mistake in the paternal advice that I am now about to offer."

"Well, let me hear it, then, papa."

"You are on the point of compromising yourself——"

She began to laugh—a little laugh that came too quickly.

"With M. Mariolle, no doubt?"

"With M. Mariolle."

"You forget, papa," she rejoined, "that according to you I have compromised myself with M. Georges de Maltry, M. de Lamarthe, M. Massival and half a dozen others of whom you have been jealous, for I never can accept the least attention from an agreeable and attached friend without all my troop bursting into fury, you at their head; you who——"

"No, no," he broke in. "You have never compromised yourself with any one. On the contrary,

you are most tactful in your relations with all your friends."

"Dear papa, I am no longer a little girl," she answered vexedly. "I promise that I shall not compromise myself with M. Mariolle any more than I did with the rest. You need not be afraid. But I acknowledge that I did ask him to come here. I like him; he is just as clever as any of our other friends and much less egotistical. You used to say this, too, until you discovered that I had a slight predilection in his favor. And since M. Mariolle is agreeable to me, I thought it would be pleasant if we could all make a little excursion together. It is foolish to deprive one's self of pleasure when there is no harm nor danger in it. How can I run any risk of being compromised if you are there as well?" She laughed frankly now, knowing that every word she had said had told, and he remained silent, irritated, displeased and embarrassed.

"Don't worry," she went on. "What can there be more proper at this season of the year than to make a trip to Mont St. Michel with my father, my uncle, my aunt and a friend? And, in any case, who will know of it? Once we are back again in Paris, M. Mariolle will be relegated to his place with the others once more."

"Very well," said her father. "Let it be as if I had not spoken."

They walked up and down a little longer, then M. de Pradon said:

"Shall we go in? I am tired and want to go to bed."

"No," answered she, "I want to stay out longer, the night is so beautiful."

"Then don't go far," her father warned. "One never knows whom one may meet."

"Oh, I shall stay right under the windows."

He kissed her on the forehead and went in. She sat down on a little bench at the foot of an oak. The night was warm, full of exhalations from the earth, mingled with the smell of the sea. A misty light now hovered over everything, for the bay in the moonlight was shrouded in a veil of mist that rose like white smoke, hiding the dunes, now covered by the rising tide. Mme. de Burne, her hands crossed, her eyes fixed on the distance, tried to look into her soul through a fog as impenetrable as that overhanging the sands. Many a time in her dressing-room in Paris had she, sitting in this attitude, asked herself:

"What do I love? What do I desire? What do I hope for? What do I wish? What am I?"

Apart from the pleasure that she felt in her own personality and the intense desire to please, she had never experienced any vivid emotion, except now and then a fleeting feeling of curiosity, quickly dying out. She was well aware of this, being too much in the habit of closely studying her face and all her person not to have observed her soul also. Up to now she had merely felt a vague interest in other people, incapable as they were of inspiring her with passion, capable at the most of amusing her. And yet, when she had felt awakening in her a preference for any one, when any rival disputing with her the possession of an admirer roused her feminine instincts in favor of him and caused to spring to birth a feeling of attachment, she had discovered in these false impulses of love a pleasure much more

acute than the gratification of ambition. Still these preferences always withered and died. Why? She grew wearied, disgusted—perhaps because she was too clear-sighted. Everything that had at first attracted her to a man, everything that had animated and allured her soon began to appear hackneyed, tiresome, banal. All men were so similar—without being identical in disposition. No man she had ever met appeared endowed with attributes calculated to retain affection or inspire love.

Was it their fault or hers? Were they lacking in what she required or was she without the power to love? Do human beings love because they meet others created with the qualities that satisfy wants inherent in themselves or do they love simply because they are born with the faculty of loving? Sometimes it seemed to her as if other people's hearts were endowed with arms, arms tender and outstretched to draw, to clasp and embrace, and that her heart was different; it had only eyes, no arms. How often she had noticed men of undoubted talent and other fine attributes falling in love with girls unworthy of them, silly, worthless, even plain girls. How did this happen and why? It was a mystery. It could not be due to any providential intervention, this crisis in the lives of beings, but to some germ that was communicated and developed instantly. She had listened to confidences, she had surprised secrets, she had even seen with her own eyes the sudden transfiguration of the soul that accompanies this intoxication, and she had pondered much over these things.

In society, in the constant round of visits, teas, dinners and other idiocies by means of which the

leisure classes kill time, she had discovered, with jealous, envious and almost incredulous surprise, beings, both men and women, in whom something unusual was the result of this influence. It did not manifest itself in any striking manner, but with her restless penetration she had felt and divined it. The faces of those under the spell betrayed them; their voices, their smiles, above all their eyes, by a something inexpressible, indescribable: a delicious happiness, a joy of the soul overflowing into the body and illuminating it. Lovers irritated her, she knew not why. She recognized and saw through them like a flash and with unerring penetration, often detecting intrigues long before society even suspected them.

When she mused over the tender folly into which the existence of another being can lure us, the agitation, the bliss which the sight of him, his voice, his touch can evoke, she felt certain that she could never experience love. Still, when wearied of all around her, beset by indefinable yearnings, tormented by a gnawing desire for change and novelty, that was perhaps nothing but a vague hungering for affection, she had sometimes wished with a secret shame born of her pride that she might meet some man who could inspire her, if only for a little time, a few months, with that bewitching ecstasy of mind and body. Life under those conditions seemed to be invested with such a wonderful light of happiness. Not only had she wished for this meeting—she had even tried to make it happen—with that indolent energy that made her so seldom persist in any enterprise.

All those beginnings of attraction toward men

said to be possessed of exceptional attributes who dazzled her for perhaps a few weeks ended in disillusion. She expected too much of them—of their nature, their character, their delicacy of mind. After each of these disappointments she was forced to acknowledge that the defects of eminent men were more salient than their good qualities: that talent is a special gift, like good sight or a sound digestion, a gift pertaining to the studio, an isolated gift, bearing no relation to those personal traits which make association with the possessor attractive and agreeable.

Since she had met Mariolle she found that she felt peculiarly drawn toward him. Did she love him? Was this love? Without prestige, without renown, he had conquered her by force of his affection, his tenderness, his loyalty, by all the true and simple traits of his character. He had conquered her, for she thought of him continually, she desired his presence continually; no other being she had ever met was so agreeable, so sympathetic, so indispensable to her. Was this love?

She did not feel that burning emotion that she had heard described, but for the first time in her life she experienced a sincere desire to be for a man something more than a fascinating woman. Did she love him? In order to love was it necessary that the object should be invested with exceptional attractions, different from and above all other men's? That he should exist in that aureole of light with which the heart surrounds the adored one? Or was it sufficient that he should please you very much—so much that you could scarcely do without him?

In this latter case she loved Mariolle, or, at least,

she was very near to loving him. After reflecting earnestly for a long time, she concluded: "Yes, I love him no doubt, but I am deficient in emotion; it is a lack in my make-up."

And yet she had been conscious of a thrill of feeling when she saw him coming toward her on the terrace of the garden that evening. For the first time she had experienced that indescribable impulse that draws one human being to another. She had felt pleasure in walking near him, in having him near her, vibrating with love for her, in watching by his side the sun setting behind Mont St. Michel, that sight that seems like a vision described in a legend. Love itself, was it not a sort of legend of the soul—a legend believed in by some from instinct, in the case of others simply because by always dwelling on it they grow to have faith in it? Would this be the way with her? She had felt a strange desire to lay her head on the shoulder of this man, to be close to him. Yes, she had felt differently toward him, compared with what she felt toward others, and she felt so now, at this moment, at the bottom of her heart. Perhaps she needed to yield to this impulse a little for it to become the real thing. She always resisted too much, she reasoned too much, she fought against the charm of others. Would it not be sweet on such a night as this to wander with him under the willows beside the river and to recompense him fully for his devotion by offering him her lips from time to time?

The window opened. She turned her head: it was her father, who was no doubt looking for her. She cried:

"You're not asleep yet?"

"If you don't come in, you'll catch cold!" he answered.

She got up and went into the house. When she had gained her room, she pushed back the curtains to look out at the mist growing whiter and whiter in the moonlight, and it seemed to her that the mist in her heart was being dissipated by the dawn of this new tenderness.

She slept well, however, and was awakened by her maid early, for they were to start immediately after breakfast so as to take luncheon at the Mount.

A drag came for them. Hearing the wheels grate on the gravelled drive, she leaned out of the window and immediately her eyes met those of André Mariolle, searching for hers. Her heart began to beat fast. She was surprised at the new and strange sensation of that muscle that throbs and pumps the blood more energetically at the proximity of certain beings. Again she repeated the words that had been on her lips in dropping off to sleep: "Am I really going to love him?" When she came face to face with him she felt that he was so dead in love with her that she longed to clasp him in her arms and offer him her lips. One glance only they exchanged, but that sufficed to make him turn pale with happiness.

The vehicle started on its way. It was a bright summer morning, full of radiance and the songs of birds. Down the hill, across the river and through the villages they went by a stony road that jolted them up and down on the seats of the drag. Mme. de Burne, after some time, began to joke her uncle on the condition of the roads, and this broke the ice, and every one began to talk and laugh. Suddenly,

in emerging from a hamlet, the bay came into view, not an expanse of yellow sand as on the previous evening, but a sheet of glittering water, the sands, the salt meadows and even the road itself farther on, the driver informed them.

For the next hour they went on slowly, so as to allow time for the tide to turn. Rows of elms and oaks dividing the fields from one another now hid from time to time the great outline of the Abbey, mounted on its pedestal of rock, at the present moment in the midst of the waters; then it would reappear suddenly, larger and more impressive the nearer they approached.

Michèle de Burne and André Mariolle gazed upon it with increasing awe and admiration; then their glances met. The poetry of this vision, bathed in the soft radiance of the July morning, appealed to them both.

They chatted with friendly ease. Mme. Valsaci related tragic incidents that had occurred in this locality, men swallowed up without warning by quicksands, others overtaken by the tide. Her husband was defending the embankment that has been so execrated by artists, arguing that it afforded uninterrupted communication with the Mount, and, moreover, had reclaimed land for pasturage and later for cultivation. Suddenly they stopped. The sea was overflowing the road, just a sheet of moisture across the stony pathway; but it indicated to those who knew that farther on there would be treacherous spots and impassable places. They must stop and wait.

"It won't be long now; it's going down fast," observed M. Valasci, pointing with his finger to the

road from which the thin coating of liquid was disappearing as if drunk in by the earth or pulled down by some mysterious force. They alighted so as to watch the strange, rapid, silent departure of the sea; step by step they followed it on. Already patches of green appeared in the receding water. These patches became larger, grew round and finally appeared like islands. Later they seemed like continents separated from each other by miniature oceans, and by and by the whole gulf was in view, abandoned by the tide. Its recession seemed like the drawing back of a gigantic silver veil, a veil full of large rents, the rents growing larger and laying bare great meadows, not yet, however, uncovering the yellow sands. They climbed back into the drag again, and everybody stood so as to see better. The road was drying, and the horses went on, but still quite slowly, and the jolting causing them to lose their equilibrium, Mariolle suddenly felt the shoulder of Mme. de Burne leaning against his. At first he thought that this proceeded from accident, but she stayed in the same position, and every turn of the wheels jolted her against him, causing his heart to bound and his frame to tremble. He no longer dared to look at the young woman, paralyzed by this unhoped-for familiarity, and thought deliriously: "Is it possible? Am I dreaming, or are we both losing our heads?"

The horses began to trot, and they all had to sit down. Mariolle felt a sudden, mysterious impulse to be polite to M. de Pradon, and he began to tender him flattering attentions. Almost as susceptible as his daughter to compliments, the old gentleman

quickly responded to this behavior and was soon smiling radiantly.

Now the drag had reached the embankment and was directing itself toward the Mount at the end of this road, built high above the sands. The River of Pontorson flowed at its left; to the right the meadows covered with fine turf, called "la Criste marine," were now succeeded by the dunes, still moist and soaking from the sea.

And still the great Abbey seemed to loom higher and higher toward the blue sky, against which it was now clearly projected in all its details, its crest ornamented with steeples and tiny towers, and the grimacing gargoyles, the monstrous headgear with which the terrified superstition of our ancestors was wont to crown its Gothic sanctuaries. It was almost one o'clock when they reached the hotel where luncheon had been ordered. They were all very hungry and went gladly to the table; every one appeared in good humor, and two hearts were sensible of the approach of happiness. At dessert, when the good wine and the pleasant conversation had put everybody into a frame of mind to see every proposition through rose-colored glasses, Mariolle asked: "How would it do to stay over until to-morrow? Don't you think it would be pleasant to have dinner here and see all this by moonlight?"

Mme. de Burne agreed at once, and the two men also; but Mme. Valsaci demurred on account of her little boy left at home. Her husband, however, reassured her, saying that the child had often been left in this manner for one night, and at once wrote out a telegram to the nursery governess. He had taken a great fancy to Mariolle, who had approved

of the embankment and had not said as so many did that it spoiled the view of the Mount.

On leaving the table they went to visit the Abbey, taking the road on the ramparts. The town, a mass of mediæval houses crowded one upon another on the block of granite that bears the Abbey on its summit, is separated from the sands by a high, battlemented wall. This wall winds upward with turns and angles, with platforms, watch-towers, one surprise after another for the eye, which at every convolution discovers a new widening of the immense horizon. All were silent, out of breath with climbing so soon after a very good luncheon and peculiarly impressed at seeing the huge edifice that was their goal appear and disappear. There, above them, it seemed suspended in the sky, an enormous tangle of spires and belfries, of granite hewn into flowers, of flying buttresses, of arches reaching from tower to tower, a marvellous masterpiece of massive yet delicate architectural lace, thrown out against the celestial azure from which it seemed to menace them with a fantastic army of gargoyles with the faces of animals. Between the sea and the Abbey, on the northern flank of the Mount, a steep slope called the "Forest," on account of being covered with old trees, makes a dark green spot against the illimitable plain of sand.

Michèle de Burne and André Mariolle, who were walking in front of the others, stopped still to look. She leaned on his arm, dizzy with an emotion she had never yet experienced. She was climbing, light and alert, ready to climb forever with him toward that wonderful edifice and toward something else also. She could have wished this steep road to be

an endless one, for for the first time in her life she was tasting happiness. She murmured:

"Heavens, how beautiful!"

"I can see nothing—except you!" he replied, gazing at her.

With a smile she answered: "I am not usually poetical, but this is so wonderful that I feel myself completely carried away by it."

"I love you to madness," he whispered. He was conscious of her arm slightly pressing his, and they went on.

A guardian met them at the Abbey gate, and they entered by a superb staircase between two enormous towers that conducted them to the guard-room. From thence they went on from room to room, courtyard to courtyard, dungeon to dungeon, listening with wonder, enchanted by all they saw: the great crypt with its exquisite columns, which with all their wondrous beauty are so prodigiously strong that they support not only the entire choir of the cathedral, but all the Merveille, a formidable construction in three stories, three Gothic piles, rising one above the other, the most stupendous masterpiece of architecture produced by the military monasticism of the Middle Ages. Next came the cloister. Their surprise was so great at its surpassing beauty that they stood motionless before that great inner court containing the lightest, most graceful and most charming colonnade of any cloister on earth. In two rows the slender, delicate columns, crowned with delicious capitals, bear through the entire length of the four galleries an uninterrupted wreath of Gothic ornamentation, showing infinite variety and inexhaustible invention, the simple,

graceful work of those artists of the Middle Ages who, abounding in imagination, wrought their dreams and visions into stone with hammer and chisel.

Mme. de Burne and Mariolle went round it slowly, arm in arm, while the rest, a little weary, admired the cloister from a distance, standing near the door.

"Oh, how heavenly all this is!" she cried, stopping all at once.

"I know nothing. I see nothing. I do not even know whether I exist. All I know is that you are near me," he answered. Then she looked him full in the face and, smiling, murmured:

"André!"

He knew then that she was his. They said nothing more, but went on, blind to all the wonders they passed by until reaching the lace staircase, which is so beautiful that it distracted them for a moment, imprisoned as it is in an arch thrown out between two belfries, to climb, it would seem, to the clouds; and they were again seized with astonishment when they reached the Chemin des Fous, a dizzy path of granite, winding without any handrail, almost to the last turn.

"May one walk there?" asked Michèle.

"No, it is forbidden," answered the guide.

She showed him a twenty-franc piece. The man hesitated. All the family, already giddy, suspended as they were above the abyss below, opposed this imprudence.

"Would you dare to go?" she asked Mariolle. He smiled. "I have climbed worse places than that," he affirmed.

Paying no attention to the remonstrances of the others, they began to mount. He went ahead on the narrow ledge overhanging the abyss and she followed him, her eyes avoiding the yawning gulf beneath, faint with terror now, desperately gripping the hand he held out to her. She could feel that he was composed and steady, sure of his head and of his footing, and she thought, even in the midst of her terror: "Truly, this is a man!" There they were alone together, surrounded by illimitable space, as high up as the sea-birds go, commanding the same horizon as the white-winged gulls, who roam aloft, ceaselessly exploring with their yellow eyes. Feeling her tremble, Mariolle asked:

"You are dizzy?"

"A little—but with you I fear nothing," she murmured in answer. Then, drawing nearer, he placed his arm around her to support her, and she was so reassured by the help that she raised her head and gazed about her. He was almost carrying her. She enjoyed the strong protection that enabled her to look around so close to heaven, and she felt grateful to him with a feminine impulse that he did not, by trying to kiss her, sully this supreme part of the expedition.

When they rejoined the others, who, racked by anxiety, had been awaiting them, M. de Pradon said to his daughter:

"Good God! What an idiotic thing to do!"

"No," she said firmly. "It ended successfully. Nothing can be idiotic that ends successfully."

He shrugged his shoulders, and they went on their downward way. After buying photographs, they proceeded to the hotel, where it was almost dinner

time. The hostess advised her guests to take a walk along the sands so as to see the Abbey from the side of the open sea, where, she said, it presents its most magnificent aspect. Although tired, the party set off and went round the ramparts, going out some distance on the dune, whose hard-looking surface was in places treacherously soft. From this side the Abbey changes its appearance from that of a marine cathedral to that of a feudal castle, as if to threaten the invading ocean with its crenelated wall pierced with loopholes and sustained by gigantic buttresses.

But Michèle de Burne and André Mariolle paid little attention to all this. They were thinking only of each other, enmeshed in the net which each had spread for the other, immured in that prison where one knows nothing of what goes on around. When they found themselves under the light of the lamps at the dinner table they appeared to awaken to earthly things, and they even made the discovery that they were extremely hungry. The party remained long at the table, and when dinner was over they forgot all about the moonlight, engrossed in pleasant conversation. No one seemed to wish to go out and no one proposed it. In vain the full moon invested with poetic gleams the shallow flood of rising tide, imperceptibly slipping up over the sands; in vain she lit up the serpentine ramparts and illuminated the outlines of the Abbey with her softening, enchanting beams. No one seemed to care to see anything more.

It was not yet ten o'clock when Mme. Valsaci, overcome with sleep, proposed that all should retire. The idea met with unanimous approval, and after exchanging cordial good-nights, they separated.

André Mariolle knew well that he would not sleep. He lit the two candles on his mantel, opened his window and looked out into the night. All his being was unnerved by the torture of vain hopes. He knew that she was there, quite near, separated from him only by two doors, and it was almost as impossible to go to her as to turn back that tide that was slowly creeping up on the dunes outside. He felt a desire to cry aloud in a torture of inappeasable longing and expectation, asking himself what he should do, for he felt that he could not endure the solitude of this evening of fruitless happiness.

Gradually all sounds had died away in the hotel and in the one winding street of the town. Mariolle remained leaning out of the window, knowing only that time was passing, watching the silver surface of the high tide, and putting off the hour of retiring, as if he had a presentiment of some inexplicable good fortune. All at once it seemed as if a hand touched the handle of his door. He started and looked round. A woman with her head veiled in white lace, and wearing one of those robes-de-chambre that look as if made of snow and silk and lace, entered. She carefully closed the door behind her; then, as if she had not seen him standing, overwhelmed with joy, in the open frame of his window, she walked straight to the mantel and extinguished the two candles.

V

A STRATAGEM

They were to meet again to say good-by the next morning before the door of the hotel. André Mariolle, who was the first to come down, awaited her with a strange mixture of anxiety and happiness. What would she do? How would she act? What would become of her and of him? What sort of adventure was this in which he had embarked—disastrous or happy? She could make of him whatever she wished—a dreamer, similar to an opium fiend, or a martyr, just as she thought fit. He walked up and down beside the two carriages—for they were now to separate: he to go back by St. Malo, so as to carry out the story she had invented, they to return to Avranches.

When would he see her again? Would she curtail her visit to the Valsacis or would she prolong it? He had a terrible dread of her first look and of her first words, for he had not seen her at all and they had scarcely spoken during their brief embrace of the preceding night. She had murmured over her shoulder at the door as she went out with her rapid, noiseless tread: "À demain, mon ami!"

He heard her voice and trembled. She was speaking in a loud tone, apparently irritated by some remark of her father's, and when André saw her on the lowest step of the staircase she wore the little tell-tale pout of impatience on her lips.

Mariolle stepped forward. She saw him and began to smile. In her eyes, now calm and peace-

ful, a light of sweetness appeared that communicated itself to the rest of her face. Then, in the hand suddenly and tenderly offered, he saw the confirmation, without restraint and without repentance, of her self-bestowal.

"Then we must part!" said she.

"Alas! madame, I feel it more than I dare to express."

"It will not be for long," she murmured. Then, as M. de Pradon approached to join them, she whispered:

"Say that you are going to make a ten days' tour in Brittany—but don't make it."

Mme. Valsaci, much excited, appeared:

"What is this that your father tells me? That you are to leave the day after to-morrow? Why, I thought you were to stay until a week from Monday!"

Mme. de Burne said gloomily:

"Papa always puts his foot in it. He knows I am almost certain to get neuralgia if I stay for any length of time at the seaside, and I am merely trying to avoid an attack. But this is scarcely the time to discuss the matter."

Mariolle's driver now came to ask him to get in at once, as he was afraid they might otherwise miss the train for Pontorson.

"When do you go back to Paris?" asked Mme. de Burne.

He hesitated a moment.

"Well, I can hardly tell," he answered. "I wish to visit St. Malo, Brest, Douarnenez, the Bay of Trépassés, Pointe du Raz, Audierne, Penmarch, Le

Morbihan; in fact, all the places of interest in the Breton peninsula. This will take——"

After a silence, during which he was supposed to be making a careful calculation:

"Fifteen or twenty days," he concluded, with exaggeration.

"That's a long time," she replied, laughing. "As far as I am concerned, if I have another nervous attack such as I had last night, I shall be obliged to return in two days."

Almost suffocated with emotion, he longed to cry out: "Thank you!" But he contented himself with kissing the hand which she extended for a farewell salutation, and after a thousand thanks, compliments and assurances of sympathy, exchanged by him with the Valsacis and M. de Pradon, the latter reassured to some extent by hearing the announcement of the Brittany trip, he climbed into his carriage and departed, his head turned toward her to the last. He returned at once to Paris, seeing nothing all through his return journey; all night long, sitting back in a corner of the carriage, his eyes half shut, his arms crossed, his soul plunged in revery, he did nothing but live over and over again the realization of his dream.

As soon as he reached home, from the moment of his return, in the silence of his library where he worked and wrote in the company of his books, his piano and his violin, there began for him that torture of impatience, like a harassing fever that is the curse of insatiable hearts. Surprised at finding himself capable of feeling interest in any pursuit, unable not only to concentrate his mind, but to keep from gnawing restlessness by busying himself in his

usual manner with music and reading, he wondered what he could do to combat this new trouble. A desire to go out, to walk about, seemed to possess him constantly: a crisis of the body brought about by the state of the mind—simply an instinctive and inappeasable longing to go in search of some one.

He put on his coat and hat and opened the door. In descending the steps he asked himself, "Where shall I go?" Then an idea that had not yet occurred to him suggested itself: they would require a place of rendezvous—some pretty and secluded place. He went up and down the avenues, then the streets and boulevards, anxiously interviewing concierges with benevolent smiles and landladies with doubtful expressions, seeing apartments with unsatisfactory hangings and carpets, and returned at night, discouraged. At nine the next morning he recommenced his quest and ended by discovering at nightfall, in a quiet street in Auteuil, at the end of a garden with three exits, a quiet cottage that an upholsterer in the neighborhood promised to furnish in two days. Mariolle described what he wanted—vrey simple furniture in varnished pine and thick, good carpets. The garden was in the charge of a baker who lived close to one of the gates. An arrangement was made with the baker's wife to take care of the rooms, and orders given to a florist to keep them supplied with flowers and plants. All this took him till nearly eight o'clock, and when he got home, tired out, he found with a pulsing heart a despatch on his bureau awaiting him. Opening it he read:

Shall be back to-morrow evening. Am sending letter with instructions. MICHE.

He had not yet written to her, fearing that his letter might go astray, as he did not know exactly when she would leave Avranches. As soon as he had dined he sat down at his writing-table to pour out what was seething in his soul. This was a long and difficult task, for every expression, every idea that suggested itself appeared clumsy, feeble, mediocre, totally inadequate to convey the passionate gratitude that inspired him.

The letter which he got from her early next morning confirmed her intention of returning that evening and begged him not to allow himself to be seen by any one for some days, in order to be able to give out the story of the Brittany trip. In it she also asked him to promenade next morning toward ten on the terrace bordering on the Seine in the Garden of the Tuileries. He got there an hour too soon and wandered about in the great garden, only peopled at that hour by early risers going to work, bureaucrats hurrying to the ministries on the left bank of the Seine, clerks, shop girls, workers of all descriptions. He experienced a reflective pleasure in contemplating these hurried people whom the need of daily bread condemned to brutalizing forms of work, and comparing them to himself at this hour on the point of meeting his sweetheart, one of the queens of society, he felt himself to be a fortunate and privileged being and thanked the blue sky above, for Providence was to him but the alternations of blue sky and rain, due to chance—the crafty overseer of things and men.

"She's sure to be late," he thought. Scarcely, however, had the idea occurred to him when the clock in a near-by tower sounded out the ten strokes,

and he imagined he saw her cross the garden, hurrying along like a working girl hastening to get to her shop. He hesitated. "Can it be she?" He recognized her gait, but was surprised at her changed appearance, so simple and plain in her modest dark suit. She walked straight to the stairs mounting to the terrace, as if she were accustomed to going there.

"She must like this place," he thought, "and come here at times to walk." He watched her raise her skirt to place her foot on the first step, then trip lightly up the rest. He went forward to meet her. She said, as soon as they were close enough together to speak:

"How imprudent you are!" anxiously. "You must not let yourself be seen like that. I could see you when I was over in the Rue de Rivoli! Come and let us sit down—back there, behind the orangery. Now, this is where you must wait for me next time."

"Then you often come here?" he could not help asking.

"Yes, indeed. I like the place; and, as I am fond of early walks, I come here to take exercise and to admire the landscape, which is very pretty. Besides, here one never meets anybody, while the Bois is impossible. But do not reveal the secret."

"Never fear!" he laughed.

Taking hold of her hand, a tiny hand hidden in the fold of her coat, he sighed: "Oh! how I love you! How long it seemed since I had left you! Did you get my letter?"

"Yes, thank you. I was glad to get it."

"Then you are not angry with me?"

"No. Why should I be? You are too nice for me to be angry with you."

He tried to find words vibrant with gratitude and love, ardent words; but none that he found suitable would come. So he repeated, too overcome to wait:

"How I love you!"

"The reason why I made you come here," she said, "was because of the water and the boats; but even then it does not look like Avranches. Still, it is not bad."

They were sitting on a bench near the stone balustrade that runs along the river, almost alone, invisible from all parts, three nurserymaids and two gardeners their only companions at this time on the terrace. Carriages rolled along the quay at their feet, footsteps sounded on the sidewalk against the wall that supported the promenade. Hardly as yet knowing what to say to each other, they surveyed that beautiful part of Paris that stretches from l'Ile St. Louis and the towers of Notre Dame to the slopes of Meudon. She repeated:

"It's very pretty, all the same."

Then, all at once struck by the recollection of their trip to the sky at Mont St. Michel, he cried:

"Do you remember our climb up the Chemin des Fous?"

"Yes, indeed! Do you know I feel a little frightened when I think of it now! I don't believe I could do it again. I was intoxicated with the air, the sun and the sea. But—look around; there is beauty to be seen here, too. I am very fond of Paris."

He was surprised and felt a confused presentiment that something existing in her at Mont St. Michel was missing now. He murmured:

"What does the place matter, so long as you are with me!"

Without answering, she pressed his hand. More overjoyed at this silent caress than he would have been, perhaps, by a tender word, he now felt his heart relieved of the embarrassment that had tied his tongue, and he spoke. He told her slowly and with solemnity that his life was at her disposal for her to do with it as she thought fit.

Pleased, but at the same time a true daughter of the times, ever a prey to scepticism and to a tendency to irony, she smiled and answered:

"Oh, pray do not give yourself away so completely as all that!"

He turned fully toward her, and, looking her straight in the eyes, repeated, with that earnest look that is almost like a touch, what he had just said, only at greater length, more ardently, more poetically. All that he had written in previous letters he now repeated to her with such fervor and conviction that she sat by, listening as if in a cloud of incense. She felt herself caressed in every womanly fibre by those adoring words as she had never been before in all her life of adulation. When he ended she answered simply:

"And I—I love you well also."

They were holding each other's hands just like the boys and girls one sees wandering in country lanes and were watching with dreamy eyes the steamboats gliding along the river. There they sat, alone in Paris, in the confused hum of movement that floated around them, more alone in the very centre of that city pulsing with life and action than they had been during the moments they spent together in the territory of the sea-gulls at the top of the Chemin des Fous; and for several seconds they

completely forgot that any other beings besides themselves existed on the earth. It was she who first returned to a sense of external things and realized that time was passing.

"Shall we meet again here to-morrow?" she asked.

He pondered for some minutes, embarrassed as to how to express what he wished to say:

"Yes—yes—certainly. But—can we not see each other somewhere else? Of course this spot is secluded—but still every one else has a right to come to it."

"That's true," she answered hesitatingly. "However, it is imperative also that you should not be seen by any of our friends for at least a fortnight, so that your story of the expedition may be believed. How mysterious and romantic it will be! We shall meet, and no one in Paris besides our two selves will know that you are in the city! But it is, of course, impossible that you should come to my house, so I don't quite see——"

He flushed and interrupted:

"I can't either ask you to come to my house. But are there not other means—other places?"

She exhibited neither surprise nor anger, being a practical-minded woman, devoid of false modesty.

"Why, yes," she replied. "But, of course, it takes time, and we must think——"

"I have thought——"

"Already?"

"Yes, already. Do you know the Rue des Vieux Champs at Auteuil?"

"No."

"It is between the Rue Tournemine and the Rue Jean de Saulge. In that little street there is a gar-

den, in that garden a cottage having exits by each of the streets that I have mentioned."

"What then?"

"That cottage awaits your presence."

She thought intently for a moment, then, quite without embarrassment, she asked two or three questions dictated by feminine prudence. He answered them to her satisfaction evidently, for, as she rose to go, she murmured:

"Very well—I'll come to-morrow."

"At what time?"

"Three o'clock."

"I shall be there waiting for you at No. 7. Do not forget." They were now standing. "Do not accompany me," she said. "Stay here for about ten minutes, and then go away by the quay. Adieu!"

She left quickly, with the discreet, modest, hurried demeanor of one of those good, industrious girls that one sees hastening through the streets to their daily scene of honorable toil. Mariolle took a fiacre and drove to Auteuil, fearing lest the cottage should not be ready in time. He found it full of workmen, the sound of the tapping of hammers resounding throughout it. The walls were hung with tapestries, and the floors covered with carpets; everything had been cleaned and put in order. The garden, which was the remnant of an ancient park, containing some fine old trees and one or two summer-houses, was being beautified by a florist. He had already planted rose-bushes, pinks, geraniums, mignonette and hosts of other flowers, whose development can be hastened or retarded so as to transform in a day an uncultivated field into a gorgeous flower bed.

Mariolle was as delighted as if he had just scored

some signal triumph; and, having made the upholsterer swear solemnly that all the furniture would be in its place in the rooms before noon the next day, he went off to buy divers bibelots in order that the interior should be as gorgeous as the garden. He chose photographs of celebrated pictures to hang on the walls, and for the mantels and tables Deck porcelain and other knickknacks dear to women. In the course of that afternoon he squandered two months' income and squandered it with delight, remembering that for ten years he had practiced continued economy, not because he wished to save, but simply because he did not feel impelled to spend; in consequence he was able now to be prodigal.

Next morning he returned to the cottage, superintended the placing of the furniture on its arrival, hung the pictures himself, mounted a stepladder, sprayed all the hangings with perfumes, burned perfumes in the rooms and sprinkled them over the carpets. In his fever of love, his rapture, he wanted to make this the most delicious, the most perfect affair he had ever attempted. Every little while he glanced at the clock, calculating how many hours, how many minutes were to elapse before her arrival, and he hurried the workmen and worried himself over the placing of the different pieces of furniture and ornaments.

Moved by prudence, he dismissed all the workmen before two o'clock, and then, during the slow last revolution of the minute hand around the dial of the clock in the silence of the house where he was awaiting the greatest happiness that the world held for him, he tasted, alone with his dream, going up and down through the rooms, speaking aloud,

imagining, giving rein to his passion-kindled fancy, the most frenzied enjoyment of love he was ever to know.

Then he went out into the garden. The rays of the sun fell on the grass through the trees, lighting up most exquisitely a basket of roses in particular. Heaven itself was smiling on the rendezvous. He went now and stood close to the front door, opening it frequently, fearing that she might mistake the number.

Three o'clock rang out and was immediately echoed by the clocks of ten convents and manufactories in the vicinity. He stood now, watch in hand, and was astonished when two light taps sounded on the wood of the door just outside his ear, for he had heard no noise of footsteps along the street.

He opened the door; it was she. She looked surprised at his prompt appearance, then glanced around apprehensively at the neighboring houses and felt reassured, for she certainly knew no one among the modest bourgeois who would inhabit dwellings of this character; then she examined the garden with curiosity that changed into approval. Finally she placed the backs of her two hands just ungloved on the mouth of her friend, then took his arm and entered the garden. She repeated at every step:

"Dieu! how lovely! How perfectly unexpected and lovely!" Noticing the basket of roses bathed in sunlight, she cried: "This seems like fairyland!"

She plucked a rose, kissed it, and put it in her corsage. They went into the cottage, and she seemed so pleased that he felt moved to kneel at her feet, although at the bottom of his heart there was, perhaps, a feeling that she might have shown a little

less interest in the place and more in him. She looked all about her, excited and pleased like a little girl who finds and handles a new toy; feeling no atom of shame or regret in this, the grave of her womanly honor, she appreciated its costly elegance with the satisfaction of a connoisseur who sees evidence that his taste has been complimented. On her way hither she had been haunted by a fear of encountering a commonplace house with stuffy, faded hangings, soiled by previous rendezvous. But everything here was new, unexpected, dainty and had been arranged expressly for her; it must have cost Mariolle a pretty penny. He was certainly perfect, this man. Turning toward him, she raised her two arms with a ravishing gesture of appeal, and they clasped each other in one of those embraces that give the strange double sensation of bliss and unconsciousness.

Before parting they went round the garden and sat down in one of the summer-houses where they were invisible to outsiders. André, full of exuberance, spoke to her as if she were an idol who for his sake had just stepped down from a pedestal, and she listened languorously as he had seen her do at the end of long visits from people who had bored her. But she remained affectionate all the same, her face irradiated by a smile that was tender, though a little constrained, and, holding his hand, she pressed it with a continuous pressure more unreflecting, perhaps, than eloquent.

She could not have been listening to what he was saying, for she broke in, in the midst of a sentence, to say:

"I must certainly go. I am due at the Marquise of Bratiane's at six. I shall be very late."

He went with her to the door which he had opened for her at her entrance. They embraced; then, with a furtive glance up and down the street, she hastened off.

Twenty days passed: days so sweet, so full of the light of happiness! It seemed to him that they could never end, that they would go on forever like this, lost to all else, he living for her alone; in his mind, the unbalanced mind of an artist who has produced nothing, always tormented by expectation, arose an impossible dream of a discreet, quiet life of clandestine happiness. She came every three days, without resistance, attracted, it would seem, as much by the amusement she found in the assignation, by the charm of the little cottage now a hotbed of rare flowers and by the novelty of this life of love, scarcely a dangerous one, since no one had any right to molest her in it, but full of mystery, nevertheless, as by the intense and ever-increasing infatuation of her lover. Then one day she said:

"Now, my dear, you must reappear in the world. You must come and spend the afternoon with me at my house to-morrow."

"Why must I reappear so soon?" he cried in dismay.

"Because if it were to leak out that you are back, the situation would give rise to suspicion."

He saw that she was right and promised to go to her house the next day. Then he asked:

"You are receiving to-morrow?"

"Yes," she replied. "A solemn little rite is to take place at my house to-morrow."

This news was unwelcome to André.

"What sort of rite?" he asked.

Mme. de Burne laughed delightedly: "I have persuaded Massival, by dint of outrageous flattery, to produce 'Didon' at my house—'Didon,' his new work which has not yet appeared. It is a poem of antique love. Mme. de Bratiane, who considered herself the sole proprietor of Massival, is exasperated. She also will be at my house, because she sings."

"Are many coming?"

"No, only a few intimate friends; you know them almost all."

"Can't I get out of going to this? I am so happy in my solitude."

"Oh, no, my friend! You know I care more for you than for all the rest put together."

His heart began to beat furiously. "Thank you," said he. "I shall be there."

VI

THE MUSICALE

"Bonjour, cher monsieur."

Mariolle could not help remarking that it was no longer "cher ami" as at Auteuil, and the handclasp was brief, the greeting of a woman whose mind was preoccupied, taken up entirely with society interests. He went on into the salon, while Mme. de Burne advanced toward the beautiful Mme. de Prieur, whose extreme decolletage and sculpturesque pretensions had earned for her the somewhat ironical

nickname of "The Goddess." She was married to a member of the Institute, of the Department of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres.

"Ah! Mariolle," cried Lamarthe. "Where did you spring from? We all thought you were dead!"

"I'm just back from a trip to Finisterre." He went on to describe his imaginary tour, but the novelist interrupted him:

"Do you know the Baronne de Frémines?"

"No; only by sight, but I have heard a great deal about her. She's very peculiar, is she not?"

"The queen of madcaps, but with a bouquet of modernity that is simply delicious. Come and let me present you."

Taking him by the arm, she led him toward a young woman whom every one likened to a doll—a pale and exquisite little fair doll, invented and created by the devil himself expressly to bring about the damnation of big, bearded children. She had long, narrow eyes, cut a little obliquely, à la Chinoise; flashes of blue enamel were visible through the eyelids—eyelids that very rarely opened wide, and, when they did, dropped again almost instantly, to veil the mystery that seemed to enshroud her. Her fair, silky hair shone with silvery reflections, and her delicate, thin-lipped mouth seemed designed by a miniaturist and chiselled by a sculptor. The voice that issued from it had crystalline vibrations; and the ideas, unexpected, sarcastic, original, mischievous, the cold destructive seduction, the complex tranquillity of this neurotic little being inspired those under her influence with stormy and violent passions. She was known to all Paris as the most extravagant mondaine of society, also the wittiest,

but no one really knew what she was, what she thought, what she did. Men in general were irresistibly captivated by her. Her husband was as insoluble an enigma as herself. Affable and lavish, he appeared to see nothing of what went on around him. Was he blind, or was he indifferent or simply good-natured? Perhaps, indeed, there was nothing to see except eccentricities which no doubt he also found amusing as well as the rest. But there were sinister rumors afloat in regard to him; some went so far as to say that he profited by his wife's dishonor.

Between Mme. de Burne and her existed mutual attraction and fierce jealousy, periods of intimacy, followed by crises of hostility.

They would be friendly, then quarrel, then seek each other again like professional duellists who appreciate each other's skill and wish for a combat to the death. Just about this time the baronne was triumphing; she had scored a victory, a signal victory. Lamarthe had succumbed to her charms; she had snatched him from her rival and enlisted him among the titled captives of her bow and spear. The novelist was épris—puzzled, charmed and stupefied by all that he had discovered in this sphinx, and he could do nothing but descant upon her charms to every one—a state of mind that had already given rise to no little gossip.

At the moment that he was introducing Mariolle to Mme. de Frémines Mme. de Burne shot a glance from the other end of the salon. Smiling, he murmured to his friend:

"Look at the sovereign of these parts. She seems displeased."

André looked, but Mme. de Burne had turned to greet Massival just appearing on the threshold. He was immediately followed by the Marquise de Bratiane, which caused Lamarthe to observe:

"Aha! we're going to have a second rendering of 'Didon.' The first has just been enacted in the coupé of the marquise."

Mme. de Frémines added:

"The collection of our friend De Burne is certainly losing its choicest jewels."

A rage against, a sort of hatred toward this woman took possession of Mariolle; also an irritation against society in general, against the life led by these people, their ideas, their tastes, their futile aims, their puerile amusements. And so, profiting by the fact that Lamarthe had bent over to whisper to the baronne, he turned on his heel and went away.

The handsome Mme. de Prieur was standing alone a few paces away from him. He went to speak to her. According to Lamarthe, this woman represented the old type of femininity in this up-to-date clique. Young, tall, pretty, with very regular features and chestnut hair exhibiting gleams of red, her tranquil and benign charm, her calm and skillful coquetry, her great desire to please disguised under an appearance of simple and sincere affection, had won her strong partisans, whom she was very careful to guard from the power of dangerous rivals. Her house was said to be the resort of a few intimates, who unanimously sang the praises of her husband. She and Mariolle began to chat. She had a sincere admiration for this quiet, intelligent man who was so little spoken of and who was perhaps equal in intellect to the others.

Now the last guests began to come in. The portly Fresnel, out of breath, wiping with a last flourish of his handkerchief his perpetually moist and shiny forehead; Georges de Maltry, the modern philosopher; then, together, the Baron de Gravil and the Comte de Marantin. M. de Pradon was assisting his daughter to receive. He was particularly polite to Mariolle, but the latter with a heavy heart watched Mme. de Burne come and go, here and there, lavishing her attentions on everybody but himself, it seemed. Twice, it is true, she had flashed him from a distance a rapid glance that seemed to say: "I am thinking of you," but the impression was so fleeting that he was not perfectly sure that he was not mistaken. Then, besides, he could not help seeing that the ostentatious court that Lamarthe was paying to Mme. de Frémines irritated Mme. de Burne.

"It is only pique," he said to himself, "the annoyance of a collector from whom a rare bibelot has been stolen." But he suffered, notwithstanding, and all the more because he saw that she watched them incessantly in a furtive manner and that the sight of Mme. de Prieur and himself seated chatting together did not appear to cause her the slightest uneasiness. This was because she was sure of him, while Lamarthe was escaping from her toils. Therefore, what was this love of theirs to her—this love born yesterday, which had obliterated all other impressions from his mind?

M. de Pradon now asked for silence, and Massival opened the piano which Mme. de Bratiane was approaching, taking off her gloves, for she was to voice the transports of "Didon," when the door opened again and a young man appeared who at-

tracted all eyes. He was tall and slight, with short, curly, fair hair and a most artistocratic appearance. Even Mme. de Prieur seemed impressed.

"Who is this?" asked Mariolle of her.

"Why, don't you know him? Count Rodolph de Bernhaus."

"Ah! the one who fought Sigismund Fabre?"

"Yes."

This event had caused a great stir. The Comte de Bernhaus, of the Austrian Embassy, a diplomat with an illustrious future awaiting him, an elegant Bismarck it was said, having heard at an official reception a scurrilous allusion to his sovereign, challenged the one who had made it, a celebrated fencer, and killed him in the duel. After this combat, the renown of the comte equalled that of Sarah Bernhardt, with this difference that the name of the young diplomat was surrounded by a halo of poetic chivalry. In addition to this he was charming socially, an agreeable conversationalist and thoroughly distingué.

He sat down by Mme. de Burne with a most gallant air, and Massival took his place at the keyboard, up and down which his fingers roamed for some instants. Almost all the guests changed their saets, drawing close together so as to hear well and also command a good view of the singer. Lamarthe and Mariolle found themselves again shoulder to shoulder.

There was a profound silence, full of expectation, attention and respect; then the musicians began by a slow, a very slow succession of notes which seemed like a musical recital. There were pauses, light repetitions, a series of little phrases, at times

languorous, at times nervous, even uneasy, but full of originality, it seemed to Mariolle. He could see a woman, the Queen of Carthage, in all the plenitude of her youth and beauty, walking slowly on the seashore. He understood that she suffered, there was upon her soul the burden of a great misfortune, and he looked attentively at Mme. de Bratiane. Motionless and pale, with her inky hair that looked as if it had been steeped in the Italian night, with her eyes looking straight in front of her, she stood waiting. There was in her strong, somewhat hard face, marked with eyes and eyebrows so dark that they looked like black stains, in all her swarthy, powerful and passionate countenance something that thrilled the audience, a menace of a coming tempest, such as one descries in lowering skies. Swinging his head with its long hair, Massival continued the story of poignant sorrow that he was relating on the ivory keys.

Suddenly a tremor seemed to convulse the frame of the singer. She opened her mouth and uttered a long and piercing wail of anguish. Not one of those shrieks of tragic despair that singers emit on the theatrical stage with dramatic gestures, neither was it one of those screams of love betrayed that bring down the house with applause, but an indescribable cry, a cry of the flesh and not of the soul, like the howl of a mangled brute, the cry of animal femininity deceived and forsaken. Then she grew silent and Massival again took up more vibrantly, more feelingly the history of that wretched queen abandoned by the man she loved.

Once more the voice of the woman arose. She spoke now—spoke of the intolerable torture of lone-

liness, of her unappeasable craving for vanished caresses and the agony of knowing that he is gone forever. Her liquid and thrilling voice made every heart in that audience quiver. She seemed to suffer all that she described: to love, or, at least, to be capable of loving with a furious ardor, that swarthy Italian with her ebon hair. When she finished, her eyes were swimming in tears, and she wiped them away slowly. Lamarthe, bending toward Mariolle, quivering with the excited sensibility of an artist, said:

"Dieu! How grand she is at this moment, mon cher: that is a woman—and the only one here!"

Then, after a short pause, he added:

"But who knows? It may all be just a mirage due to music. After all, nothing exists except illusion. But what an art—to be able to evoke illusion, that or any other form of illusion!"

Then there came an intermission between the first and second parts, and the composer and his interpreter were warmly congratulated. Lamarthe especially was very lavish with his compliments, and he was thoroughly sincere, as a man particularly able to feel and comprehend and one keenly susceptible to beauty expressed in each and every form. The manner in which he described to Mme. de Bratiane what he had felt in listening to her was so flattering that she flushed with pleasure, and the other women who were looking on conceived some spite thereat. Very likely he was not unaware of the envy he was awakening in their breasts.

When he returned to his place he perceived the Comte Rodolphe de Bernhaus sitting beside Mme. de Frémines. She looked as if she had begun at

once confiding some secret to him, and they were smiling at each other as if enchanted with their conversation. Mariolle, more and more gloomy, was standing near a door; the novelist joined him. The portly Fresnel, Georges de Maltry, the Baron de Gravil and the Comte de Marantin were all standing around Mme. de Burne, who was dispensing tea. She seemed encircled by a crown of worshippers. Lamarthe remarked this sarcastically to his friend, adding:

"But a crown that has lost a jewel, and I would wager that she would gladly give all the diamonds of the Rhine to recover the missing gem!"

"Whom do you mean?" asked Mariolle.

"Why, Bernhaus, the handsome, the irresistible, the incomprehensible, he for whom this fête was given, for whose sake was worked this miracle of getting Massival to induce his Florentine Dido to sing here."

André, although incredulous, felt a pang shoot through his heart.

"Has she known him long?" he asked.

"Oh, no! ten days at the most. But she has made herculean efforts during those days and shown herself a masterly tactician. If you had been here you would have laughed."

"Indeed! Why?"

"She met him for the first time at Mme. de Frémines'. I was dining there that night. Bernhaus is very intimate there, as you may see—just look at him! Our beautiful friend, De Burne, at once started to work to conquer the redoubtable Austrian. She succeeded and she will continue to succeed, although the little Frémines is infinitely

superior to her in impudence, in genuine indifference, and, perhaps, in perversity. Our friend, De Burne, is more skillful in coquetry, more womanly —I mean by that more modern-womanly; that is to say, irresistible through that artificial power of fascination which is to-day more effective than natural power to charm. It is not, accurately speaking, artificial, either; but æsthetic, the profound feeling for the æsthetic inherent in women. It is in this that her power consists. She knows her own powers thoroughly, because she pleases herself more than any one else, and she is never mistaken in the proper way in which to conquer a man."

"I think you are exaggerating," protested Mariolle. "To me she has always seemed very simple and natural."

"That is because simplicity and naturalness are the best bait to use to attract you. However, I don't wish to speak against her; I find her superior to almost all her associates. But, all the same, they are not women."

Some chords now struck by Massival called for silence; and Mme. de Bratiane sang the second part of "Didon." She was a superb Dido in her interpretation of physical passion and sensual despair. But Lamarthe never removed his eyes from the *tête-à-tête* of Mme. de Frémines and the Comte de Bernhaus. As soon as the last chords of the piano were lost in the applause of the audience, he continued in an annoyed tone as if he were arguing with an adversary:

"No, they are not women. Even the best among them are conscienceless jades. The more I see of them the less I experience that sensation of sweet

intoxication which a true woman should awaken in a man. They do intoxicate us, it is true, but in exciting our nerves, for they are drugs! Oh, yes! —the taste is very nice—but the wine is not the real wine of other days. You see, my friend, women are created and put upon the earth for two things only—two things which alone can develop her true, her grand and excellent qualities—love and children. I am speaking like M. Prudhomme. Now, these women of to-day are incapable of loving, and they don't wish to have children. When they do unfortunately become mothers, they regard it as a misfortune, a burden. The fact is they are monsters!"

Astounded at the violent expressions of the author and the fire flashing from his eyes, Mariolle asked:

"Then why do you pass half your time tied to their apron strings?"

"Why? why?" answered Lamarthe impetuously. "Because they interest me. And, besides, would you forbid a doctor to walk the hospitals? These women are my clinic!"

This argument appeared to calm him. He went on:

"And then I like them because they so thoroughly reflect this era. At bottom I am scarcely more of a man than they are women. As soon as I begin to be attracted by one of them I cast about to discover what qualities she has that will repel me; in this way I am able to detach myself, just as a doctor takes poison so as to test an antidote. So I never get seriously entangled. I play the game just as well as any of them—perhaps better, and it helps me by supplying material for my books, while they derive

no benefit whatever from it. How silly they are! What do they become in the end? Failures, nothing but failures, embittered by the lessening of their powers to attract as age creeps on."

Listening to him, Mariolle seemed to feel himself a prey to depression—a depression like that felt after a long succession of dark, rainy days. He knew perfectly well that the man of letters was not far wrong in his premises, but he could not admit that he was entirely correct. So, with some irritation, he argued with him not so much to defend women as to make contemporary literature responsible for their apparent decadence:

"In the era when novelists and poets set forth exalted and idealistic work," said he, "work calculated to stimulate the imagination, women sought and believed they found in life the reflection of that which they had found in fiction and poetry. To-day you persist in suppressing all poetical and romantic portrayal and create only works setting forth disillusionizing realism. Now, my dear fellow, love being dead in fiction is the cause of its death in our midst. You were the inventors of the ideal, and they believed in your inventions. At present you are the creators of realism, and, following in your wake, they have begun to believe in the vulgarity of everything."

Lamarthe, who greatly enjoyed literary discussion, was beginning a dissertation when Mme. de Burne came up. This was decidedly one of her best days. She was dressed to delight the eye, and wore the challenging and assertive air that the consciousness of a struggle always gave her. She seated herself.

"This is what I like—to surprise two men who are talking and not talking for me," she said. "What are you discussing?"

Without embarrassment and in a tone of gallant raillery Lamarthe revealed to her the question at issue. Then he resumed the argument with the added fervor due to her presence. She became interested at once in the subject and took up the cudgels for the modern woman with much wit and cleverness. She interpolated remarks, incomprehensible to the novelist, on the fidelity and attachment of which the most flirtatious could be capable, and Mariolle's heart beat high. When she had left them to go and sit by Mme. de Frémines, who had persistently detained the comte, Lamarthe and Mariolle, charmed by her feminine cleverness and grace, declared to each other that she was incontestably an exquisite woman.

"Now, look at her!" exclaimed the novelist.

It was the great passage at arms. What were they talking of now, the comte and the two women? Mme. de Burne had arrived at the psychological moment, when the *tête-à-tête,* too prolonged even for people who were épris, was becoming wearisome; and she broke in with an indignant air, repeating what she had heard Lamarthe say. It was very applicable to Mme. de Frémines; moreover, it had just been uttered by her most recent victim: the Comte de Bernhaus was an exceptionally quick-witted man, who would immediately grasp the whole situation. At once the argument grew animated. Then the hostess called Lamarthe and Mariolle over to take part; and the discussion waxing warmer, she insisted on everybody joining in.

So a lively war of words ensued, every one contributing his or her convictions, and Mme. de Burne, allowing a perhaps slightly insincere touch of sentiment to soften her bright sayings, contrived to be the wittiest and most brilliant of all, for this was most indisputably a day of success for her, when she appeared cleverer, livelier and prettier than ever before.

VII

DOUBTS

As soon as André Mariolle had left Mme. de Burne, the incisive charm of her presence vanished. He felt within and around himself, in his flesh, his soul, in the air, in the entire world a sort of disappearance of that happiness in living that had recently animated and sustained him.

What had happened? Nothing—almost nothing. She had been charming to him at the end of that reception, telling him in one or two eloquent glances: "For me you are the only person here." And yet he felt that he had made discoveries in regard to her that he would have liked to ignore. They amounted to nothing, that is, almost nothing; and still he felt stunned, like a man who has surprised his mother or his father in a doubtful action, when he learned that during these twenty days, the twenty days which he had believed given up, devoted entirely by her as they had been by him, minute by minute, to the new and intense enjoyment of their love, she had resumed the tenor of her former existence: made

many calls, plans, projects, recommenced those detestable struggles for supremacy with her rivals, pursued men, received adulation with delight and displayed all her allurements to others besides himself. Already; she had done all this already!

If it had been later, he would not have minded so much. He knew the world, the ways of women of society, their sentiments, their habits; he was too intelligent to have been exacting or unduly anxious. She was beautiful, made to please, to receive homage and listen to compliments. From among all her admirers she had chosen him, boldly, royally. He would have remained, he still remained all the same, the grateful slave of her caprices and the resigned spectator of her life as a brilliant woman. But he suffered within—in that dark cavern in the innermost recesses of the soul where our keenest susceptibles lie hidden. He was wrong doubtless; he always had been at fault in this manner ever since he could remember. He was too highly strung for comfort in his relations with other people; his soul was too thin-skinned. This was why he had always led so isolated a life; he dreaded contact and consequent jarring. In that it was he that was wrong, not others, for this dread of being jarred proceeds from a person's incapability of making allowances; from being unable to endure in others qualities not existing in oneself. However, he could not alter the pitch to which his sensibilities were keyed.

Certainly he had no reason to reproach Mme. de Burne. If she had insisted on his keeping away from her salon and remaining hidden during all those days, it was in order to prevent suspicion, to elude surveillance, to be more safely his in the

future. Then why this pain gnawing at his heart? Ah, why, indeed? Because he had thought her entirely his, and now he had discovered that he never could seize and hold as his own the entire personality of this woman: that belonged to everybody.

He knew also, none better, that life is made up of approximations; up to now he had been resigned to this, hiding his discontent under a veil of distant reserve. But this time he had hoped that he would attain that which he had ceaselessly but vainly expected; that he would possess the woman he loved in her entirety: but to possess anything in its entirety is not given to any one on this earth. His evening was a melancholy one, but he tried to console himself by finding reasons to account for the painful impression he had carried away. When he was in bed this impression, instead of diminishing, deepened, and, as he never allowed any impulse of his soul to remain unanalyzed, he began to look for the source of this new uneasiness. It came, went away and came again, like little gusts of icy wind, awakening in his being a suffering, as yet indefinite and vague, but as dispiriting in its effect as those twinges of neuralgia brought on by a sudden draught of cold air—twinges that foretell a coming siege of agony.

Above all, he knew that he was jealous—jealous not only as a passionate lover, but as a man in possession of the object of his desire. As long as he had not seen her surrounded by other men, this sensation had remained dormant, although he had felt aware of its existence and had foreseen its awakening; but he had expected the awakening to be altogether different.

He doubted her instinctively, with an impulse of distrust that was tingling in his veins even more than influencing his thoughts; the almost physical discomfort of a man who is not sure of the fidelity of his consort. Then the doubt began to crystallize into suspicion.

After all, what was he to her? Her first lover or her tenth? The direct successor to M. de Burne, the husband, or the successor to Lamarthe, Massival and Georges de Maltry and the predecessor, perhaps, of the Comte de Bernhaus? What did he know of her? That she was radiantly pretty, surpassingly chic, intelligent, bright and witty, but fickle, easily turned aside, wearied or disgusted; in love with herself far more than with anything or anybody else, and an insatiable coquette. Had she had a lover or lovers before him? If she had not, would she have given herself up to him with such callousness or have entered his room so audaciously that night at the hotel? Or would she have agreed so readily to the rendezvous at Auteuil? Before consenting to go there she had simply asked a few questions, the questions that would occur to a prudent and experienced woman. He had answered circumspectly, like a man accustomed to such adventures, and she had said "yes," completely reassured, knowing it was all right from knowledge gained at earlier rendezvous.

He recalled how she had rapped with discreet authoritativeness at that little door behind which he stood with wildly beating heart; how she had entered without any perceptible emotion, only exhibiting anxiety as to whether she were likely to be recognized by those living in the neighboring houses; how she had seemed immediately at home in that

house leased and furnished purposely for their meetings. No woman, it seemed to him, however bold, superior to moral conventions, disdainful of prejudice, could have been so thoroughly unmoved at a first rendezvous. Mental worry, physical hesitation, the instinctive dread of new paths, would she not have experienced all these had she not been a little practiced in this kind of adventure and if custom had not worn the bloom from her natural modesty?

With that irritating, intolerable fever that agitation of mind produces Mariolle tossed and turned in his bed, carried away by one dominating idea, like a man who imagines he is slipping down a precipice. He tried to arrest the course and break the thread of his thoughts; he tried to call up reassuring ideas and common sense arguments, but the germ of fear was there, and he could not prevent its leavening his imagination.

Still, what had he to reproach her with? Nothing more than being different from himself, not comprehending life as he did and not having the same degree of sensibility that characterized him.

As soon as he awoke next morning the desire to see her again, to fortify by her presence his confidence in her came upon him like hunger, and he awaited the suitable moment to make her his first official visit. When she saw him enter her little drawing-room, where, seated alone, she was writing letters, she came toward him with outstretched hands.

"Ah! good-day, cher ami!" she cried, with so bright and sincere an expression of joy that all the odious thoughts whose shadows still darkened his being took flight at the sight. He sat down near

her and began to speak at once of the manner in which he loved her, for now they were not in the same position in regard to each other as before. In tender words he made her understand that there exist on the face of the earth two kinds of lovers: those who desire like madmen and on the morrow of their triumph grow cool and those whose chains possession only rivets closer; in whom sensual love, intermingled with the immaterial, inexpressible appeal that the heart of such a man sends out to the woman he desires, brings about complete and torturing subjugation. Torturing? Yes, it is always torturing, no matter how happy the lover may be, for nothing, not even in the most intimate moments, ever completely slakes the thirst for Her that men carry in their hearts.

Mme. de Burne listened, charmed, grateful and delighted. She grew excited listening to him, just as one grows excited at a theatre watching an actor play his part with consummate skill, so that the rôle awakens an echo in one's own life. An echo was, in fact, awakened in her; and the echo was that of a sincere passion, but the passion did not exist in her heart. However, she felt glad to have evoked that sentiment, glad, too, that she had evoked it in a man capable of so exquisitely expressing it; a man who pleased her thoroughly and to whom she was truly attached, of whom she felt the need more and more, not physically, but to gratify her mysterious, feminine personality, eager for tenderness, homage and conquest—so glad that she wished to embrace him, to tender him her lips, everything, so that he might continue to adore her like that.

She answered him artlessly and without prudery,

with the tactful skill peculiar to some women, indicating to him that he also had made great progress in her heart. And in the salon, where by chance that day no one came to disturb them till twilight, they remained *tête-à-tête* together, dwelling on the same topic, caressing each other with words which did not carry the same meaning to their two souls. Lamps had just been brought when Mme. de Bratiane appeared. Mariolle got up to leave. As Mme. de Burne accompanied him into the first salon, he asked her:

"When shall I meet you there?"

"Shall we say Friday?"

"Yes. What time?"

"The same—three o'clock."

"Till Friday, then, adieu. I adore you."

During the two days of expectation that separated him from this meeting, he discovered, he experienced the sensation of loneliness as he had never experienced it before. He needed the presence of a woman, and nothing but this imperative need existed on earth for him; and as this woman was quite near to him, and nothing but social conventions prevented him from going to her at any moment, he grew exasperated in his solitude at the slow passing of time, at the utter impossibility of performing an action thoroughly feasible.

He arrived at the rendezvous three hours too soon; but waiting there where she would come pleased him and soothed his nerves, after having suffered so long in awaiting her mentally in places where she did not come.

Installing himself near the door long before the clock struck, he began to tremble with impatience as

soon as the hour rang out. He waited on, and then the quarter-past sounded out. He looked up and down the little street cautiously, but it was empty from end to end.

The minutes crawled by with torturing slowness. He drew out his watch continually, and when the hand arrived at the half-past, he felt in his soul the impression of having been standing in that spot an incalculable time. Then he heard a light foot on the pavement, and the little taps given by a gloved hand on the door made him forget his anguish and overflow with gratitude toward her.

A little out of breath, she asked:

"Am I very late?"

"No, not very."

"Just imagine, I had hard work to get away at all. My house was full of people, and I scarcely knew how to get rid of them. Tell me, are you here under your real name?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"So that I may be able to send you a despatch if I am prevented from coming."

"I am supposed to be M. Nicolle."

"All right. I shan't forget. Dieu! how lovely it is in this garden!"

The flowers, coaxed, renewed, multiplied by the gardener, who found that he had to do with a customer who paid liberally and never haggled, stretched all along the garden in five great, variegated, odorous stripes. Stopping in front of a bench near a basket of heliotrope:

"Let us sit here," she said. "I have a funny story to tell you."

Then she related him a piece of gossip so fresh

that she was still quite excited over it. It seems that Mme. Massival, the former mistress of the artist, whom he had married, exasperated with jealousy, had got into Mme. de Bratiane's house in the midst of a soirée, when the singer was singing, accompanied by the composer. There she had made a frightful scene, to the fury of the Italian and the surprise and joy of the guests. Massival, almost crazy, tried to get her away, but his wife slapped his face, pulled out handfuls of his hair and beard, bit him and tore his clothes. He was helpless in her clutches, but Lamarthe and two servants came to his rescue and managed to get him away from the claws and teeth of the infuriated woman.

Calm was only restored, however, after the departure of the married pair. Ever since the musician had been invisible, while the novelist went about relating his experience in a most witty and amusing manner.

Mme. de Burne was quite upset about it, so much so that she could talk of nothing else. The names of Massival and Lamarthe returning constantly to her lips irritated Mariolle.

"You have just heard this?" he asked.

"Yes, of course—about an hour ago—scarcely an hour."

He thought bitterly: "And this is what made her late!"

Then he asked: "Shall we go in?"

Absent-minded and docile, she replied: "Oh, certainly."

When an hour later she had left him, for she said she was in a hurry, he went back alone into the little, solitary house and sat down in a low chair in their

room. The impression of having no more possessed this woman than if she had not come at all seemed to create a black hole in his soul, his being, into whose depths he gazed. He saw nothing; he understood nothing; he seemed to comprehend nothing any more. If she had not eluded his kisses, she had at any rate eluded the embrace of his tenderness by a mysterious unwillingness to belong to him. She had not refused to come; she had not stayed away. But it appeared to him that her heart had not come there with her: it had stayed away far off, roaming about, amused by trifles. He now perceived clearly that already he loved her with his senses as much as with his soul, perhaps more. The disappointment of his futile caresses inspired him with a frenzied desire to rush after her and fetch her back. But what would be the use, since her fickle mind was set on other matters that day? He would have to wait for the whim of love to come to his changeable mistress just as other caprices did. He went home slowly, very tired, with heavy steps, his eyes fixed on the pavement. And he remembered that they had made no rendezvous for the future—neither at her house nor anywhere else.

VIII

REVIVING HOPE

Until the beginning of the winter she remained faithful to their tryst—faithful but not prompt. During the first three months she often came late—generally from three-quarters of an hour to two

hours after the time assigned. As the autumn rains often forced Mariolle to wait under his umbrella behind the garden door, shivering, his feet in the mud, he had a sort of little kiosk built of wood with a porch, behind this door, so as not to risk a wetting at each of these rendezvous. The trees were bare now, and the roses and other summer flowers were replaced by great masses of white, pink, violet, purple and yellow chrysanthemums, emitting a slightly acrid and balsamic odor that conveyed a sort of melancholy suggestion of autumn. In front of the cottage some rare flowers formed a great Maltese cross with their delicate shades. Mariolle never could pass this plot without a pain at the heart, at the thought that this cross seemed to indicate a tomb. Many a long hour he passed in the little kiosk behind the garden door. The rain would patter on the roof, then run along its edge and drip down; and at every vigil in the chapel consecrated to Expectation he would go over the same arguments, call up the same hopes, anxieties and discouraging thoughts. For it was one continued struggle, an unforeseen, incessant struggle, desperate, exhausting, a struggle with something which perhaps did not exist—the love of this woman.

How bizarre their meetings were! Sometimes she would arrive laughing, full of gossip, and would sit down without taking off her hat or veil or even kissing him. She did not often remember to kiss nowadays; her head was full of interesting preoccupations, far more delightful than the wish to offer her lips to those of a lover inspired by ardent passion. He would sit by her, his heart overflowing with burning words which found no utterance;

he would listen to and answer her, and, while seeming to be deeply engrossed in all she was telling him, would try at times to take her hand, which she would give him without observing that she did so, in a cool and friendly manner.

At other times she would seem tenderer and more loving; watching her intently, with the eyes of a lover who is conscious of possessing a portion only of his mistress' heart, Mariolle saw perfectly well that this comparatively affectionate demeanor proceeded from her having that day encountered no particular distraction or excitement to occupy her mind. Her continual delays also proved to Mariolle how little she cared for these meetings. One always hastens toward that which one desires; but every pretext is seized with readiness to postpone the hour for a disagreeable duty. A singular comparison occurred to him in connection with this. During the summer the desire for his cold plunge made him hurry his daily toilet, while in frosty weather he welcomed anything that happened to delay his arrival at the baths. The rendezvous at Auteuil, it seemed to him, must be for her what his winter douches were to him.

After a while she assigned the dates for their meetings at longer and longer intervals, and then would often postpone them to the next day, sending a dispatch at the last moment, pleading lame excuses that she thought would be acceptable, but which threw him into nervous, mental and physical excitement. If she had shown decided coldness, shown that she was bored by the passion which she saw and felt constantly increasing, he would probably have been at first angry, then offended, then

discouraged, and finally appeased. On the contrary, however, she appeared fonder of him than ever, flattered by his love, more anxious to retain it, and she continued to show him a preference that began to arouse the jealousy of all her other admirers. She never could see him often enough at her house, and the same telegram that would postpone the rendezvous would always pressingly invite him to dinner or to spend the evening with her. At first he took these invitations as meant for a salve after the disappointment, but at last he came to understand that she very much liked to have him with her: that she needed his words of admiration, his glances of love, the discreetly caressing atmosphere of his presence. She needed him just as any idol needs worshippers in order to become a god: in the empty chapel it is only a piece of carved wood, but let even one devotee enter, prostrate himself and pray and the piece of wood is transformed into a god equal to Allah, or Brahma. Mme. de Burne felt herself born to fill the rôle of a fetish; fitted by nature to triumph over men by virtue of her beauty, grace, charm and coquetry, she was pre-eminently a sort of human goddess, delicate, disdainful, exacting and haughty, exalted and apotheosized by the incense of men.

She manifested her predilection and affection for Mariolle almost openly, careless of what people would say; perhaps with a secret desire to inflame and exasperate her other adorers. He was almost always to be found at her house, generally in the big fauteuil that Lamarthe called "the pulpit," and she experienced sincere pleasure in remaining entire evenings alone with him, chatting and listening to

him talk. She enjoyed his intimacy in which he revealed his soul, this contact with a cultivated man of superior mind who belonged to her as absolutely as the little bibelots scattered about her salons. She also revealed to him much of her inner life, her thoughts, in these confidences that are as sweet to give as to receive; feeling herself more open with him, franker, more sincere, than with any other person, and loved him the more accordingly. With him, also, she experienced that impulse, inherent in many, women, to impart some of their most intimate personality, to confide all that was possible of her inner self, a thing she had never before felt impelled to do. In her eyes this appeared a great deal for her to do, but to him it seemed little; he longed for, he hoped for, the great final abandonment of her soul to him, a gift she had never yet bestowed in answer to his caresses. As to caresses, she seemed to regard them as useless, tiresome even. She submitted to them not indifferently, but with quickly following weariness, the weariness succeeded by ennui. Even the slightest caresses seemed to fatigue and unnerve her. For instance, when in talking together, he would take one of her hands and hold it in his, and kiss the fingers one after the other as if they were bonbons, she would always seem anxious to get it away, and all up his arm he could feel the effort she made of withdrawal. When at the end of his visits, he would impress on her neck, between the collar of her dress and the little fluffy curls at the nape of her neck, a long kiss, which sought the aroma of her body through the folds of material covering it, she invariably made a slight

retreating movement, and he could detect an almost imperceptible shrinking of her skin under his lips.

All these signs pierced him like stabs from a knife; and he would leave her presence with wounds that bled ceaselessly in his hours of solitude. How was it that she had not had at least that period of intoxication that in almost every woman follows voluntary abandonment of herself to a lover? This interval, often short and often followed by fatigue and disgust, is very rarely missing altogether. This mistress had made of him not a lover, but a sort of intelligent associate.' Still, what had he to complain of? Those who give themselves in their entirety perhaps had not so much to give.

He did not pity himself, he only feared: he feared that other, the one who would come all at once, met to-day or to-morrow, artist, society man, officer, strolling player, it did not matter who, born to please this woman, who would please her because he was born for that purpose: the one who would arouse in her for the first time the imperious desire to love. Already he was jealous of the future, just as he had been jealous of the unknown past, and just as all the intimates were jealous of him. Some believed he was her lover; others, following Lamarthe's opinion, thought she was simply amusing herself, driving him insane, just to annoy and exasperate them—but nothing more serious. Her father was disturbed and made remarks to her that were received with hauteur, and the more people talked, the more she persisted in testifying openly her preference for Mariolle by departing from the prudent circumspection that had always regulated her life.

He, however, growing uneasy over the murmurs of suspicion, spoke of them to her:

"What does it matter to me?" she asked.

"But, if you really loved me——"

"Do I not love you, mon ami?"

"Yes, and no. You love me very much at home, in your own house—and very little elsewhere. I should prefer the contrary for my own sake—and for yours, too."

She began to laugh, and answered:

"One can do but one's best!"

"Oh, if you knew!" he answered; "how hard I try to make you love me! But the more I try, the more it seems to me that I am trying to seize something intangible, to clasp a statute of ice that gradually melts away in my arms."

She scarcely answered, rather disliking the subject, and put on that distraite look that she wore so often at Auteuil. He did not dare to pursue the theme, but gazed at her as one sees amateurs at museums gaze at objects that they long to carry away with them.

His days, his nights, now contained for him only hours of suffering, for he lived with the fixed idea that she was his, yet not his, captive yet free, in his hold, yet out of his grasp. He lived about her and near to her, and did not reach her, and he loved her with all the unsatisfied hunger of his body and soul. Just as he had done at the foreshadowing of their liaison, he began to write letters to her. By means of pen and ink he had succeeded in overthrowing her virtue—perhaps by the same means he would be able to overcome this new and secret resistance.

Making fewer visits to her house, he repeated in almost daily letters the inanity of his effort to make her love him. Occasionally, when he had been specially elqouent, passionate, grief-stricken, she would vouchsafe an answer. Her letters dated for effect "Midnight," "One A.M.," "Two A.M.," etc., were bright, terse, well-expressed, encouraging, and yet disheartening to him. She reasoned clearly, wrote wittily, and even with imagination. But in vain he read and reread them; in vain he pronounced them just, intelligent, well-expressed, graceful and satisfying to his vanity as a man. They did not come from the heart; they did not really satisfy any more than did the kisses given in the cottage at Auteuil.

He could not at first understand how this was; but by dint of reading them over and over he came to see the reason. It is by studying their writings that one contrives most thoroughly to understand people. Words spoken dazzle and deceive because we watch the eyes and the lips of the utterer: the eyes and the lips please and allure, but the black words on the white paper betray the naked soul.

Men succeed by the cunning use of rhetoric, by professional dexterity, by practice in using the pen continually in the affairs of life, in being able to disguise their true natures in what they express on paper, either in impersonal, utilitarian or literary prose. But women rarely write except to speak of themselves, and they put a little of their personality into every word. They know no tricks of style, and they betray themselves by the naïveté of their expressions. He called to mind the correspondence of celebrated women: how clearly the writers had re-

vealed themselves, the pedants, the witty women, the sentimental ones.

What was most striking in Mme. de Burne's letters was the utter absence of sensibility. This woman could think; but she could not feel. He recalled letters he had had from other women, for he had had many. A little bourgeoise, met during his travels, and with whom he had contracted a liaison that lasted three months, used to write him delicious, vibrant letters, full of delightful and unexpected turns. He had often been astonished at the flexibility, the vivid elegance, the variety of her style. How did she come by it? Simply through her capacity for feeling—nothing more. A woman does not elaborate her periods; emotion, pure emotion, dictates her phrases: she uses no dictionary. When she feels strongly she writes expressively, without any trouble, or any studied elegance, aided by the sincerity of her nature.

The sincerity of Mme. de Burne's nature came to her assistance, and she wrote the letters of a clever and amiable woman. Mariolle tried to discover more than this by reading between the lines, but there was nothing more to find. How was it she had found so little to send him? For her he had found words like burning coals dropping from his pen.

When his valet brought him his mail, Mariolle's eyes always searched among the letters for the longed-for handwriting. When he had found it, an involuntary emotion would surge up in his heart, making it throb wildly; he always took this letter first, and would dwell on the address before tearing open the envelope. What would she say? Would

the word "love" be there? She had never yet used that word without adding "well" or "very much"; "I love you well," or "I love you very much." How thoroughly he was used to this formula that lost all power by using additional words! Can there be much or little in loving?

To love "very much" is to love poorly: one "loves"—that is all—it cannot be modified or completed without being nullified. It is a short word, but it contains all: it means the body, the soul, the life, the entire being. We feel it as we feel the warmth of the blood, we breathe it as we breathe the air, we carry it in ourselves as we carry our thoughts. Nothing more exists for us. It is not a word; it is an inexpressible state indicated by four letters. Mariolle had become the victim of this little verb; and his eye ran along the lines trying to decipher in them some revelation of tenderness resembling his own. He certainly found enough to justify him in saying: "She loves me well," but never what would enable him to cry: "She loves me!" Her letters continued the pretty and poetical romance begun at Mont St. Michel; it was literature relating to love, but it was not love.

When he had finished reading and rereading her letters he would put the cherished sheets carefully in a drawer, and sit down in his easy-chair, where he passed many hours devoted to sad thoughts.

After a while she wrote but rarely, tired no doubt of repeating the same things over and over. Besides, she was undergoing a sort of social crisis that André had felt approaching, with that increase of suffering which the slightest disagreeable incident will produce in troubled souls. It was a winter

of fêtes. Paris was in the grip of a whirlwind of pleasure: all night long, fiacres and coupés rolled along the streets, with apparitions of white-clad women behind their windows. Nothing was spoken of but comedies, balls, matinées and soirées. It was like an epidemic of pleasure attacking all classes of society, and Mme. de Burne did not escape the contagion.

It began with her by a success attained at a ballet performed at the Austrian Embassy. Through the intervention of the Comte de Bernhaus, relations had been established between Mme. de Burne and the ambassador's wife, the Princess de Malten, who had taken a violent fancy to her. They became intimate friends in a short time, and by this means Mme. de Burne obtained the entrée to the most exclusive circle of diplomatic and aristocratic society. Her grace, beauty and intelligence, her rare wit, soon enabled her to make good her footing there; she became the fashion, and soon the carriages of the élite found the way to her door. Every Monday a long file of them with armorial bearings emblazoned on their doors stood along the sidewalk in the Rue du Général Foy, and her servants, losing their heads, confused duchesses with marchionesses, countesses with baronesses, in announcing the high-sounding names at the door of the salon.

Mme. de Burne was enraptured. The compliments and invitations lavished on her, the homage tendered, the feeling of having become one of that elect band, flattered and adored by all Paris, the joy of seeing herself petted, admired, sought everywhere inspired in her an intense spirit of snobbishness.

Her artistic clan rose in revolt; and this bond of common feeling brought about an intimate alliance among the band of friends. Even Fresnel was welcomed into the body corporate: he was enrolled and became a force in the league of which Mariolle was the head, the others well knowing the influence he wielded with her, and the friendship she entertained for him. But he could do nothing except look on helplessly at her floating joyously away on the tide of popularity and society, like a boy gazing aloft at his red balloon that has broken away and is mounting toward the clouds.

He felt that that great and secret happiness which he had never entirely despaired of was now drifting away from him forever. He was jealous of everything and everybody, of men, of women, of inanimate things. He detested all that pertained to the life she was now leading, all the people she met, all the fêtes she attended, the balls, the concerts, the theatres, for each took a portion of her being, and they absorbed her days and nights. This fierce resentment corroded his soul; his health began to suffer, and his altered appearance struck Mme. de Burne, who asked him:

"What is the matter with you? You are changed: you have got so thin!"

"The matter is that I love you too much," he replied.

She flashed him a grateful glance, murmuring:

"One cannot love too much, mon ami!"

"Do I hear *you* say that?"

"Why, of course!"

"You do not comprehend that I am dying of loving you in vain!"

"In the first place, you do not love me in vain; and, in the second, people do not die of love. To sum up, all my friends are jealous of you, which proves that you cannot be so very badly treated by me."

"You do not understand," he said, taking her hand.

"Yes, I do; I understand you very well."

"You understand the desperate appeal that I am continually addressing to your heart?"

"Yes, I understand it, and it causes me much pain, for I love you enormously. But then——"

"Well?"

"You see, you keep saying to me: 'Be like me; think, feel and express yourself as I do.' But I can't, my poor boy. I am as I am. You will have to accept me as God made me, since I have given myself to you, a thing which I do not regret, which I have never desired to retract, for you are to me dearer than any being that I have ever met."

"You do not love me!"

"I love you with all the power of loving that is in me. If the power is not greater than it is, is it my fault?"

"If I felt sure of the truth of what you say, I should be able to content myself."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I believe you to be capable of loving more intensely, but that I also believe myself incapable of evoking a real feeling of love in you."

"You are mistaken, mon ami. You are more to me than any one has ever yet been or ever will be. I believe this absolutely, at least. When with

you I possess the great merit of being truthful, of being sincere, of not simulating what you would desire me to feel: many women are not so sincere as this. Now, allow me credit for this, do not excite yourself, do not get overstrung; try to feel confidence in my affection, which is entirely and truly yours."

He murmured, realizing how far apart they were from each other: "Oh, what a peculiar way of understanding and speaking of love! For you, I am simply a person whom you desire to have often seated in a chair near you. For me, you are the entire world. I know only you, I feel only you, I want only you."

She smiled benignly and said:

"I know it, I guess it, I comprehend it. I am delighted at it, and say: 'Love me always as much as that if you can, for this is my greatest happiness, but do not compel me to act a farce which would be unworthy of us both.' For some time now I have been anticipating this crisis, and I feel it keenly, for I am deeply attached to you, but I cannot bend my nature and make it like yours. Take me just as I am."

"Have you ever experienced a feeling, for even a day, an hour, that you could love me differently?" he asked all at once.

She was nonplussed, and reflected for some minutes. He waited in anguish of mind, and continued:

"Now, you see, you see! You *have* dreamed of another sort of love!"

"I may have been mistaken in my own impressions for a moment," she murmured slowly.

"Oh, what a subtle, psychological quibble!" he

cried. "One cannot dissect in that way the impulses of the heart!"

She mused again, interested in her own thoughts, interested in this matter, in this attack upon herself, then she said:

"Before loving you as I now love, I had imagined, I think, for a moment that I should feel for you more ardor, but in that case I should certainly have been less simple, less frank, perhaps less sincere later on."

"Why less sincere later on?"

"Because you fence love in with the formula 'All or nothing,' and in my opinion, this means, 'All at first, nothing afterward.' It is when the nothing begins that a woman commences to be insincere."

He answered in great perturbation of spirit:

"But you don't understand my wretchedness and the torture it is to me to imagine that you might have loved me differently. You have conceived this idea: therefore, there must be another whom you will love some day in this way."

"I don't believe there is," she replied unhesitatingly.

"But why? Why, since you have had the presentiment of this love, have been visited by a suspicion of this irrealizable and torturing hope of mingling your life, your soul, your flesh with those of another, of merging his being in yours and yours in his? Since you have felt the possibility of all this you will experience the reality some day."

"No. It was my imagination that misled me, and I that misled my imagination. I give you all I have to give. I have thought over all this a great

deal ever since I have been your mistress. Do you notice that I fear nothing—not even words? Really, I am almost positively convinced that I cannot love more or better than I do at present. You see, I am speaking to you as I do to myself. I do this because you are so very intelligent, you grasp everything so fully, you penetrate to the root of a matter. It is best, therefore, to hide nothing from you: to do so is the only means to bind us together closely and for a long time: this is what I long for, mon ami."

He listened to her as a man dying of thirst seizes the cup tendered to him; then he fell on his knees, his forehead touching her dress. He held her little hands to his mouth, crying:

"Thank you! thank you!" When he finally raised his head to look at her, her eyes were filled with tears; then, in her turn, entwining her arms around André's neck, she drew him to her gently, and kissed him on his eyelids.

"Sit down," she said. "It is not prudent to kneel like that in here."

He sat down, and after a silence of several instants during which they gazed at each other, she asked him whether he would take her some day to the exhibition of the sculptor, Prédolé.

She had in her cabinet-de-toilette a specimen of his work, a bronze figurine, a cupid pouring water into the bath, and she wished to see the display of his entire works now on view in the Galerie Varin.

They set a date, then Mariolle rose to go.

"Will you come to Auteuil to-morrow?" she asked, very low.

"Oh, yes. indeed!"

And he left, dizzy with joy, intoxicated by the "perhaps" that never dies away in hearts that love.

IX

DISILLUSION

Mme. de Burne's coupé, drawn by two horses going at full trot, rolled along the Rue de Grenelle. The hail of the last wintry storm, for it was a day in early April, beat noisily against the glass of the coupé, and rebounded into the road already whitened by the icy grains. Passers-by hurried on under their umbrellas, their coat collars drawn up over their necks. After two weeks of fine weather, an odious revival of winter had set every one shivering.

Her feet in a footwarmer, her body wrapped in a coat of rich fur whose velvety caress warmed her through her dress, feeling delicious where it touched her delicate skin, the young woman was reflecting with disinclination that in an hour she would have to take a fiacre and go to meet André at Auteuil. A strong desire to send a telegram postponing the meeting almost prevailed, but she repressed the impulse, for two months ago she had promised to do this as seldom as possible. Since that time she had been making a great effort to love André as he loved her. Seeing him suffer so keenly, she had been overcome with pity, and, after the conversation during which she had kissed him on the eyelids, in a burst of real tenderness, her sincere affec-

tion for him became for a period warmer and more expansive.

Surprised at her involuntary coldness, she had asked herself why she should not, in the end, love him as much as other women did their lovers, since she felt deeply attached to him and he pleased her more than any other of her admirers.

This apathy she experienced must proceed from an indolence of the heart, which could be overcome like any other form of indolence.

She tried to overcome it. She attempted to rouse herself by thinking about him, by trying to get up a little emotion on the days of their rendezvous, and in this she succeeded at times, just as one works one's self up to feel afraid by dwelling on apparitions and burglars when alone at night. Growing interested in this game of love, she even tried to be more caressing and succeeded pretty well at first, nearly driving Mariolle wild with intense delight.

Then she imagined she felt developing in herself a fever similar to that consuming her lover. Her intermittent dream of love that had seemed realizable the evening when she decided to give herself to André, the evening of the milky mists covering the Bay of St. Michel, again appeared; not so seductive, less wrapped in clouds of idealism and poetry, but more definite, more human.

Mariolle understood, little by little. He watched the factitious ardor die down. He divined her self-sacrificing effort, and a mortal, an inconsolable grief took possession of his soul.

She knew now as well as he that the test had failed and that all hope was lost. On this April day, warmly wrapped in furs, sighing with a sensa-

tion of well-being as she heard the hail rattle against the glass, she felt her courage waver at the idea of deserting the luxurious coupé to brave the icy interior of a fiacre and go to meet André.

But she never entertained the thought of breaking away from his caresses and refusing to go to Auteuil. Well she knew that in order to captivate a man, to keep him for one's self away from rivals, it is necessary to hold him by that physical chain that was beginning to gall her: this she knew, for it is logically indisputable. Loyalty also demanded that she should go to meet him, and she desired to be loyal. So she would give herself again, she would always give herself; but why so often? Would not the meetings hold a greater charm for him, an added charm, if they took place more seldom, if they were looked upon as rare and inappreciable opportunities for bliss offered by her, which must not be lavished too prodigally?

Always, on her way to Auteuil, she felt the consciousness of bringing him a most priceless offering, an inestimable gift. When one gives in this manner, the joy of giving is inseparable from a certain sense of sacrifice: it is not the joy of being loved, it is the pride of being generous, and the contentment of making another person happy.

She even calculated that the love of André would be more likely to be durable if she refused herself occasionally to him: for all hunger is intensified by fasting, and what is sensual desire but an appetite?

As soon as she had made the resolution she decided to put it into practice that day. She would go to Auteuil, but she would feign indisposition. As soon as this determination was made, the trip

for which she had felt such distaste a moment ago seemed quite easy to undertake. Smiling to herself, she understood what had brought about the change in her feelings, after a moment's consideration. She had not wished to go, because all the little details of the rendezvous were on her mind: how she always pricked her fingers with the steel pins, which she was very awkward in handling, and how she was never able to find any of her articles of apparel in the room where she had hastily divested herself of them, preoccupied already by the odious prospect of having to dress without a maid. She stopped then, struck by a thought over which she wished to ponder: was it not a little vulgar, a little repugnant to her, that idea of love at a certain hour, fixed beforehand, like a business appointment or one with a doctor or a dentist? After a long *tête-à-tête* what was more natural than a kiss shared by lips that had been uttering warm and tender speeches? But how very different was the kiss without surprise, arranged for beforehand, that she went to receive once a week, her watch in her hand. How true it was that on the days she was not to see André she often felt vague impulses to go to him; while these feelings rarely came to her when she went to him with the precautions of a suspected thief, in a dirty fiacre, her mind distracted by a thousand other matters.

Ah! the hour for Auteuil! She had counted the minutes to it on the clocks of all her friends; she had watched it coming, minute by minute, at Mme. de Frémines', at Mme. la Marquise de Bratiane's, at the beautiful Mme. Le Prieur's, when she went about Paris on those afternoons so as to avoid

being at home where an unexpected visit, or some unforeseen obstacle might prevent her getting away.

"Since I am to take a holiday I shall not go there too early," she said to herself. So she opened at the front of her coupé a sort of little invisible panel, hidden under the black silk with which her coupé, a veritable boudoir, was lined and padded. As soon as the two tiny doors of this hiding-place were pushed back on each side, appeared a mirror on hinges, which she raised to a level with her face. Behind the mirror were placed in niches of satin different little silver articles—a powder-puff, a pencil for the lips, two perfume bottles, an inkstand, a penhandle, scissors, a tiny paper cutter. An exquisite clock, the size and shape of a gold walnut, was affixed to the silk; it indicated four o'clock.

"I have at least an hour," said Mme. de Burne to herself. She touched a spring, which made the footman seated by the coachman take the acoustic tube in his hand; taking the other end, hidden in the hangings, she put her lips to the little rock-crystal transmitter.

"To the Austrian Embassy," she ordered.

Then she looked in the mirror. She gazed at herself as she always did, with the contentment one experiences in meeting the person one loves best in the world; then she opened her coat to look at her corsage. It was a costume for the end of the winter; the collar was trimmed with a band of very fine white feathers. This trimming came up over the shoulders also, and the waist, as well, was encircled with this border of down, that gave the young woman a quaint appearance, something like that of a wild bird. On her hat, a sort of toque,

other feathers appeared—a bold aigrette of vivid colors, and her strikingly pretty face, with its blonde, fluffy hair, seemed ready to fly up with the wild ducks into the gray sky through the hail.

She was still contemplating herself in the mirror when the coupé drove through the great gates of the embassy. She fastened up her coat, put down the mirror, shut the door of the recess, and said to the coachman when the coupé stopped:

"Return to the house; I do not need you any more." Then to the footman, as he came out on the steps of the entrance:

"Is the princess at home?"

"Yes, madame."

She went in, climbed the staircase, and penetrated to the little salon where the Princess de Malten was writing letters. On seeing her friend enter, the ambassador's wife rose with an exclamation of delight, her eyes shining, and they kissed each other twice on each cheek, just at the corner of the lips. They sat down together on two little chairs in front of the fire. These two women were very congenial; they were a good deal alike, both being of the same type, developed in the same atmosphere and guided by the same tastes, although Mme. de Malten was a Swede, married to an Austrian. They exercised upon each other a mysterious and peculiar attraction, from which proceeded a sentiment of genuine contentment when together. Sometimes they would gossip without intermission for entire half days; futile gossip, interesting to them simply on account of their similarity of tastes.

"Now, you see how much I love you!" cried Mme. de Burne. "You are coming to dine with me

to-night, and yet I could not resist the temptation of coming to see you. It is simply a passion, my dear!"

"A passion which I share," answered the princess, smiling. Moved by habit, each did her best to win the admiration of the other, coquettish as if a man were present, but differently coquettish, no longer in the view of an adversary, but in that of a rival. Mme. de Burne, while chatting, often glanced at the clock. It was almost five; he had been waiting, therefore, for an hour.

"It is late enough," she said to herself, and she rose to go.

"Already?" exclaimed the princess.

"Yes, I am in a hurry. Some one is waiting for me," answered Mme. de Burne daringly. "I'd much rather stay with you, though." The princess having sent to fetch a fiacre, they embraced and parted. The horse limped painfully as it dragged the old fiacre along. Mme. de Burne seemed to feel the infirmity and fatigue herself as she noticed this; like the broken-winded animal, she found the transit long and tedious. The pleasure she felt at the idea of seeing André consoled her, but the remembrance of what she was about to do worried her.

She found him standing behind the door, half frozen; between the trees the sleety showers were descending, whirled by the wind, the hail rattling on their umbrellas as they went toward the cottage, their feet deep in the mud. The garden was withered, dead, miry. André looked very pale; he was suffering.

"Dieu! how cold the weather is!" she exclaimed,

as they entered. A fire was blazing in the room; as it had been lighted since noon only, the house was damp, and she felt herself shiver.

"I don't think I'll take off my furs at once," she remarked. She opened the front of her coat only, and revealed the feather-trimmed corsage, in which she looked like a bird of passage. He sat down beside her.

"I'm going to give a charming dinner this evening, and I feel delighted at the prospect," she announced.

"Who is to be there?"

"Why, you, of course; then Prédolé, whom I have so longed to know."

"Prédolé is coming!"

"Yes. Lamarthe is bringing him."

"He seems rather a strange person for you to ask. Sculptors are, as a rule, scarcely the kind of men to appeal to women of your type, and Prédolé least of all."

"Oh, nonsense, my dear! I admire him so much."

During the last two months, since his exhibition at the Galerie Varin, the sculptor, Prédolé, had been the rage of Paris. He had been admired before that; people had said, "He makes delicious figurines"; but when the artistic public had viewed all his creations assembled on exhibition, an outburst of enthusiasm had occurred. They discovered in them an unexpected charm, the outcome of the artist's special gift in reproducing elegance, making his representations of form peculiarly seductive.

He had adopted the specialty of statuettes very slightly clad, and in this had produced specimens of inimitable perfection. His danseuses, particu-

larly, of which he had exhibited a good number, showed in their gestures, their poses, in the harmony of their attitudes and movements, the climax of feminine flexibility and grace of form.

For a month now, Mme. de Burne had been making continual efforts to induce him to come to her house; but the artist was shy, even a little boorish, it was said. She managed to succeed at last, through the intervention of Lamarthe, who had made a frenzied appeal to the grateful sculptor.

"Who else is coming?" asked Mariolle.

"The Princess de Malten."

He felt annoyed; he did not like this woman.

"Who else?"

"Massival, Bernhaus and Georges de Maltry. That is all—only my élite. You know Prédolé, do you not?"

"Yes, a little."

"What do you think of him?"

"He is, of all the men I know, the one most truly in love with his art, and the most interesting when he speaks of it."

She was delighted to hear this, and said: "How charming!"

He had taken her hand under her fur coat and pressed it a little; now he kissed it. This made her remember that she had neglected to say that she did not feel well, so, seeking another pretext, she murmured:

"Dieu! how cold the weather is."

"Do you think so?"

"I am frozen to the bone."

He got up and looked at the thermometer, which was certainly indicating very low temperature;

then he sat down beside her again. She had just said: "Dieu! how cold the weather is," and he imagined he knew why. During the last three weeks he had observed at each of their meetings a diminution of her efforts toward tenderness of feeling. He divined that she was weary of this simulation of affection—so weary that she could not keep it up, and he was himself exasperated to such a degree at her inability to love him, and so harassed by a mad and futile desire for this woman, that he began to say to himself: "I'd rather break with her than continue like this!"

In order thoroughly to understand her intention, he asked her: "You are not even going to take off your furs to-day?"

"Oh, no," she replied. "I have been coughing a little ever since the morning. This frightful weather affects my throat; I'm afraid I shall be ill." Then, after a pause: "If I had not wanted so much to see you, I should not have come at all."

As, seized with rage and torn with grief, he did not answer, she went on:

"After such beautiful weather the last two weeks, this change is very dangerous."

She gazed out into the garden, where already the trees were almost white under the drifting snow eddying around the branches. He looked at her, thinking: "This is the sort of love she has for me!" For the first time, a sort of hatred against her possessed him, a hatred for her, for her face, her intangible soul, her body, so eagerly pursued and so elusive.

"She pretends that she is cold!" he said to himself. "She is cold just because I am here. If

she were invited to some function of pleasure, one of those imbecile caprices that fill the useless existences of these useless creatures, she would brave all, she would risk life itself to go. She goes out on the coldest days in winter in an open carriage, just to display her toilets, very often. They are all alike, these women, nowadays." He looked at her, calmly facing him, and he knew that, in spite of the serenity of that adored little face, she felt an intense desire to cut short this *tête-à-tête* that was becoming so painful.

Was it possible that there ever had existed, that there existed now, women capable of passion, who, overcome by emotion, suffered, wept, gave themselves with delight, who loved with their bodies as intensely as with their souls, with the mouth that speaks, the eyes that gaze, the heart that palpitates, and the hand that caresses; women who brave all because they love, who day or night, spied on and menaced, go, intrepid and palpitating, to throw themselves into the arms of a lover? How horrible this love of his for the woman to whom he was chained; a love without result or aim, without joy or triumph, without sweetness or intoxication, that brought nothing but regret and care, suffering and tears, in its train; only suggesting the ecstasy of partaken caresses by the intolerable disappointment of kisses unreturned by those cold lips, arid and sterile as dead branches.

He looked at her, imprisoned and charming in her feather-trimmed gown. Were they not powerful enemies, enemies to be conquered even as the woman herself, these costumes, jealous guardians,

coquettish and sumptuous barriers, fencing his mistress in and keeping her from him?

"Your gown is beautiful," he said; he would not touch on that which was inflicting torture upon him.

"Wait till you see the one I am going to wear to-night!" she returned, smiling. Then she gave several little coughs and said:

"I am catching cold. Let me go now, mon ami; the sun will shine again very soon, and I shall follow his example."

He did not press her to stay. He was disheartened, knowing well that no effort now could overcome the apathy of that inert love; that all was over, over forever. No hope existed of hearing passionate words issue from that serene mouth, or seeing the light of love in those calm eyes. Suddenly he felt arise in him a desire to escape from this torturing domination. She had nailed him to a cross; he bled from every pore, and she looked on, watching him in agony and not comprehending his sufferings, pleased even to have inflicted them.

He would wrench himself free from this instrument of torture even though he left there portions of his body, fragments of his flesh and all his lacerated heart. Like an animal in whom the weapons of the hunter have left a little remnant of life, he would drag himself to some solitude where perhaps his wounds might cicatrize and thereafter betray their existence only by dull, aching pain.

"Good-by, then," he said.

Struck by the sadness of his voice, she remarked:

"We shall meet again this evening, mon ami."

"Yes, this evening," he repeated as he went with her to the garden door. Then he came back

to sit alone by the fireside. Alone! Yes, it certainly was cold—and how sad! Well, it was all over now. Oh, what a horrible thought! No more hoping, expecting, dreaming of being with her, dreaming with that glow at the heart that at times makes of beings on this dull earth, for some ineffable moments, beacons illuminating the rayless night. Good-by to those nights of solitary emotion, when he walked the room till almost daylight, thinking of her; and the awakenings when he would say, opening his eyes: "I shall meet her in a few hours in our little cottage."

How he loved her! How long and hard the task would be to cure himself of this! She went away because the weather was cold! He recalled her as she sat a little while ago there, looking at him, bewitching him, in order the more deeply to stab his heart. Well, she had already pierced it pretty thoroughly; he could feel the hole, an old gaping wound, opened just now anew by the knife of her utter indifference so that it was now incurable; he could feel something flowing from it, surging up in him and choking him. Placing his hands before his eyes, as if to hide his weakness from himself, he began to weep. She went away because the weather was cold! He would have walked, naked, through the snow anywhere to meet her. He would have jumped from a roof, only to fall at her feet. The recollection of an old legend occurred to him, one attached to the "Hill of the Two Lovers," seen on going to Rouen. A young girl, obeying the mandate of a cruel father who forbade her marrying her lover unless she carried him to the top of the mountain, dragged him there, walking on her hands and

feet, but fell dead on gaining the summit. Love is nothing now except a legend: a legend useful for furnishing material for songs or romantic fabrications. Had she not, herself, uttered at one of their first interviews a sentiment which he had never forgotten? "The men of to-day do not love the women of this era to the degree of inflicting injury on themselves. Believe me, I know them, both the men and the women." She had made a mistake as far as he was concerned, but not with regard to herself, for she had gone on to say: "As for me, I warn you that I am incapable of deep feeling for any one—no matter whom." "No matter whom!" Was she sure? For him she was right, he was aware of that; but for another? She could not love him; but why not? Then the consciousness of having missed everything life had to offer overcame him: a consciousness which had long since taken possession of him.

He had done nothing, succeeded in nothing, obtained nothing, conquered nothing. Art had tempted him, but he had lacked the courage to devote himself to any special branch and the persistency necessary to insure victory. No success had come to rejoice him, no elevated tastes of any kind had ennobled or exalted his character. The one sincere, whole-hearted effort he had made to conquer the heart of a woman had proved futile, like everything else he had attempted; at best he was nothing but a failure. He continued to weep, his hands covering his eyes, the tears trickling down on to his mustache and lips.

When he again raised his head he saw that it

was night. He just had time to go home and dress to go to Mme. de Burne's dinner.

X

A FAREWELL

André Mariolle was the first guest to arrive at Mme. de Burne's that evening. He sat down and gazed around him at the walls, at all the objects that he had loved because they were hers—the paintings, the bibelots, the furniture, all that familiar interior, where he had learned to know her, where he had felt his passion intensify from day to day, until it had won its useless victory. How often and how ardently he had waited in this pretty room made expressly for her—a delicious setting for an exquisite gem. How well he knew the odor of the salon, clinging to the hangings and all its belongings—the simple, aristocratic scent of the iris. In this spot he had trembled with expectation, had pulsed with hope, had run the gamut of all the emotions. He pressed as if they were the hands of a friend that he was forsaking the arms of the large fauteuil in which he had so often sat chatting with her, watching her talk and smile. He would have liked her not to come into the room; have liked it to remain with him its only occupant, remaining all through the night, dreaming of his love, as one watches over the body of a beloved one; and then to have gone away at dawn for a long time, perhaps forever.

The door opened. She entered and came toward him, her hand outstretched. He mastered himself and betrayed no emotion. This was not a woman, but a bouquet of flowers—an inimitable bouquet. A band of pinks clasped her waist and fell all around her down to her feet in cascades. Around her bare arms and shoulders ran a garland of myosotis and lilies of the valley, while three fairylike orchids seemed to proceed form her throat and caress the pale flesh of her bosom with their supernatural pink and red. Her blond hair was dotted with enamel violets, in which flashed diamonds; and other brilliants, trembling on gold pins, scintillated like drops of water in the perfumed trimming of her dress.

"I shall have a headache," she said, "but I can't help that. This is very becoming."

She smelt like a garden in springtime, and looked fresher than her flowery adornments. André looked at her, dazzled, and thinking that it would be as barbarous to take her in his arms at this moment as to trample on a beautiful flowerbed. Women's bodies were nothing but pretexts for display, objects for ornamentation, nowadays; they were not meant to inspire love. They looked like flowers, like birds, like hundreds of things as much as like women. Their mothers, all the women of past generations, employed art to enhance their beauty, but they tried, above all, to please by the natural seduction of their bodies, their grace, the irresistible attraction that the feminine being exercises over the hearts of men. To-day, coquetry was the whole armament, artifice the means and also the end, for they made use of it more to irritate their rivals

and to excite their envy and jealousy than to captivate men.

For whom was this toilet got up—for him, the lover, or to humiliate the Princesse de Malten?

The door opened and she was announced. Mme. de Burne sprang toward her, and, carefully mindful of the safety of the orchids, she embraced her with a little cry of delight, and a kiss, a pretty and most desirable kiss was exchanged by the two mouths. Mariolle quivered with anguish. Never had she run toward him with such happy impetuosity; never had she kissed him with such fervor, and again the words occurred to him: "These women are not made for us."

Massival appeared, then behind him M. de Pradon, the Comte de Bernhaus and Georges de Maltry, resplendent with English chic. Only Lamarthe and Prédolé were now wanting to complete the party. They began to speak of the sculptor, and every voice was raised in eulogy.

"He had resuscitated the grace, regained the traditions of the Renaissance with something additional —modern sincerity. He was, according to M. Georges de Maltry, the exquisite exponent of human flexibility." These sentences had for two months now been going the rounds of all the salons, given out by all mouths, listened to by all ears.

At last he made his appearance. Every one was surprised. He was a short man, of uncertain age, with the shoulders of a peasant and a strong face, with well-marked features and grizzly hair and beard, a powerful nose, thick lips, and a timid and embarrassed air. He held his arms rather far from his body, a habit attributable, no doubt, to the enor-

mous hands that protruded from his sleeves. They were broad, thick, with hairy, muscular fingers, the hands of a Hercules or a butcher, and they appeared clumsy and embarrassed at being en évidence, but impossible to hide.

His face, however, was illumined by a pair of bright, piercing gray eyes of extraordinary vivacity. They seemed the only live part of this dense, heavy man. They looked, scrutinized, searched, flashed everywhere, with sharp, rapid and mobile glances, and it was felt that a great and quick intelligence directed the movements of these questioning eyes.

Mme. de Burne, a little disappointed, politely indicated a chair, and the artist sat down. He sat there, confused, scarcely knowing what to say. Lamarthe, adroit in matters of tact, wishing to relieve him, went up to his friend.

"Mon cher," he said, "I wish to show you where you are. You have already seen our divine hostess; now look at all she surrounds herself with."

He pointed to an authentic bust by Houdon on the mantel; then, on a Boule writing-desk, two women dancing, with their arms entwined, by Clodion; finally, on an étagère, four Tanagra statuettes, chosen from among the most perfect specimens. Then the face of Prédolé lighted, as if he had been wandering in a desert and had suddenly met one of his children. He got up and walked toward the little antique figures, and when he seized two of them at a time in his formidable hands, Mme. de Burne feared for them. But as soon as he had grasped them it almost seemed as if he were caressing them, he handled them with such surprising supple adroitness, twisting them about in his

thick fingers, suddenly become agile as those of a juggler. Watching him look at and touch these figures, it became evident that this heavy, stout man had in his soul and in his hands an ideal and delicate tenderness.

"Do you think them pretty?" asked Lamarthe.

Then the sculptor descanted on their beauty and spoke of other remarkable figures he knew of in a rather husky voice, but quietly and decidedly, his language being dictated by an astute mind that weighed and understood well the value of words. Conducted by the novelist, he then inspected the other rare bibelots which madame had accumulated, thanks to the counsels of her friends. He appreciated them with joy and astonishment at finding them in this place; and he always took them in his hands and turned them about on all sides, as if to put himself into tender contact with them. A bronze statuette, heavy as a cannon-ball, was hidden in a dark corner; raising it with one hand, he brought it near a lamp, admired it in a leisurely manner, then put it back in its place without visible effort.

"He's built to struggle with stone and marble, that chap!" remarked Lamarthe. They all looked at the sculptor with interest.

A servant announced: "Madame is served."

The mistress of the house took the arm of the sculptor, to pass into the dining-room, and when she had made him sit at her right, she asked him, with courtesy, just as she would have interrogated the scion of some illustrious house as to the origin of the family name:

"Your art, monsieur, has the merit of being the most ancient of all the arts, has it not?"

"Mon Dieu, madame!" he answered in his quiet voice, "the shepherds in the Bible played the flute; music appears the most ancient, although, in our sense, real music does not date very far back. But veritable sculpture goes a long way back."

"Do you like music?" she asked.

"I love all the arts," he answered, with grave conviction.

"Is the inventor of yours known to fame?" she asked again.

He thought a moment; then, with a gentleness of speech as if he were relating a touching story, he answered:

"Acccording to tradition, it was the Greek Dædalus. But the prettiest legend is that which attributes the invention to a potter of Sicyone named Dibutades. His daughter, Kora, having outlined with an arrow the shadow of her fiancé's profile, the father filled in the silhouette with clay and modelled it; then my art was born!"

Lamarthe murmured: "Charming!" After a silence, he said: "Ah! if only you would, Prédolé!" Then, addressing Mme. de Burne, he said:

"You don't know, madame, how interesting this man is when he talks of what he loves; how well he knows how to describe it and to make all others adore it!"

But the sculptor did not seem inclined to pose or to make speeches. He had tucked his napkin into the front of his shirt, so as not to soil his dress-coat, and he was eating his soup with the attention, even respect, that peasants always feel for that part

of the dinner. Then he drank a glass of wine, and sat up, looking more at ease and as if he were becoming acclimated. From time to time he tried to turn round, for he perceived, reflected in a mirror, a modern group of statuary, placed behind him on the mantel. He did not know it, and sought to find out the sculptor. At last, being no longer able to stand it, he asked:

"That is one of Falguière's, is it not?"

"Yes, it is one of Falguière's," answered Mme. de Burne, smiling. "But how did you find that out, just in the mirror?"

"Madame, I recognize, it does not matter how, at a single glance the sculpture of men who also do painting, and the painting of men who also do sculpture. It is never the same as the work of a man who confines himself strictly to one art."

Lamarthe, wishing his friend to shine, demanded explanations of this, and Prédolé gave them. He defined and characterized the paintings of sculptors and the sculpture of painters, in so clear, original, and novel a manner, in his slow, precise way, that the guests listened as much with their eyes as with their ears. He went back in the history of art, epoch by epoch, citing examples of each, till he reached the first Italian masters, painters and sculptors at the same time: Nicolas and Jean de Pise, Donatello, Lorenzo Ghiberti. He quoted the opinions of Diderot on the same subject, and in conclusion, cited the gates of the baptistery of St. Jean de Florence by Ghiberti, bas-reliefs so vivid and dramatic that they look like paintings on canvas. With his great hands working in front of him as if they were full of material to be modelled, and mov-

ing so lightly and flexibly that they delighted the eye, he reconstructed the specimens of art under consideration with such conviction that every one followed with interest, his fingers creating in the air above the plates and glasses all the images described in words. Then, on being offered something he was fond of, he left off talking and began to eat. During the rest of the dinner he spoke little, scarcely following the conversation, which veered from theatrical gossip to politics, from a ball to a marriage, an article in the Revue des Deux Mondes to the horse races, recently opened. He ate well and drank moderately, without appearing to be affected by it, having a clear, strong, sane head, not easily disturbed by good wine.

When they had returned to the salon, Lamarthe, who had not yet obtained all he wished from the sculptor, drew him to a glass case and showed him a priceless bibelot, a silver inkstand engraved by Benvenuto Cellini.

Then a sort of intoxication seemed to overcome Prédolé. He contemplated the inkstand as if it were the face of a mistress, and, seized with emotion, gave utterance in regard to the work of Benvenuto Cellini of ideas as fine and graceful as the work of that divine engraver himself; then, seeing that all were listening, he let himself go, he warmed to the subject, and, seated in a deep easy-chair, holding and gazing continually at the gem which had been put into his hands, he related his impressions on all the marvels of art known to him, revealed his sensibility, and showed the strange intoxication produced in his soul by the influence of forms of grace observed by the eye. For ten years he had wan-

dered over the face of the earth, observing only marble, stone, bronze and wood, carved by cunning hands, or gold, silver, ivory and brass metamorphosed into chefs-d'œuvre under the fairy fingers of engravers. And he himself worked as he spoke, creating bas-reliefs and delicious, modelled objects evolved in the mind by the precision and expressiveness of his diction.

All the men seated around him hung upon his words, while the women seated near the fire seemed rather bored, chatting in a low voice from time to time, wondering how any one could feel so enthralled by talking over so simple a matter as the contours of objects.

When Prédolé left off, Lamarthe, excited and delighted, pressed his hand, and said, in a voice softened by the influence of a common love:

"Really, I feel like embracing you. You are the only artist, the only impassioned and great artist of to-day; the only one who really loves what he works at, finds happiness in it, never weariness or disgust. You handle art, eternal art, in its purest, simplest, highest, most inaccessible form. You create the beautiful by the curves of a line and you care for nothing else on earth. I drink your health in a glass of eau-de-vie!"

Then the conversation became general, but it hung fire, stifled by the ideas that had been given out in that pretty salon furnished with precious objects. Prédolé left early, giving as his excuse that he began work every morning at daybreak. When he had gone, Lamarthe, enthusiastic, asked Mme. de Burne:

"Well, how did you like him?"

She answered hesitatingly, with an indifferent look:

"Oh, well enough; but he is rather long-winded."

The novelist smiled, thinking: "Parbleu! he did not admire your toilet; and you are the only bibelot here that he scarcely noticed." After some polite speeches, he went over to the Princess de Malten, in order to flirt with her. The Comte de Bernhaus came up to the hostess, and, seating himself on a little tabouret, seemed to be prostrate at her feet. Mariolle, Massival, Maltry and M. de Pradon continued to speak of the sculptor, who had greatly impressed them. M. de Maltry compared him to the ancient masters whose entire lives were illuminated and embellished by the exclusive and over-mastering love of manifestations of beauty, and he elaborated his opinion with subtle, exact, and elaborate phrases that were rather tiresome.

Massival, tired of hearing an art spoken of that was not his own, went over to Mme. de Malten and sat next to Lamarthe, who soon gave up his place to him, going to rejoin the other men.

"Shall we go?" said he to Mariolle.

"Yes—willingly."

The novelist enjoyed talking at night, going along the street, accompanying some one home. His dry, strident voice seemed to cling to and climb up the walls of the houses. He felt himself to be eloquent and clear-sighted, witty and original on these nocturnal *tête-à-têtes,* when he monologued rather than chatted. He earned for himself a quiet success that soothed him, and he prepared himself a quiet night's rest by this slight fatigue of the legs and the lungs.

Mariolle was at the end of his endurance. All his misery, his ill-fortune, his grief, all his irremediably bitter disappointment had been seething in his heart ever since he crossed her threshold that evening. He could stand no more; he would go away, never to return. When he said adieu to Mme. de Burne, she returned his farewell with an absent-minded air. The sidewalks had become gray and dry again, but in the roadway patches of wet still shone in the gaslight. Lamarthe said:

"What a happy man Prédolé is! He loves only one thing, his art; thinks only of that, lives only for that, and it fills, brightens and makes his existence happy. He is emphatically an artist of the old kind; he does not care much about women, that man—our kind of women, that is, with the ornaments, the laces and other disguises. Do you notice how little attention he paid to our fine ladies, who are, nevertheless, very fascinating? All that appeals to him is plastic art; nothing artificial. It is true that our charming hostess judged him insupportable and imbecile. In her eyes, a Houdon bust, an inkstand by Benvenuto Cellini, Tanagra figurines, are only little ornaments created for the setting of a rich chef-d'œuvre—herself! Herself and her dress, for her dress is a great part of herself; it is the new note which she gives each day to her beauty. How frivolous and personal a woman is!"

He stopped and knocked the sidewalk with so sharp a rap of his cane that the noise reverberated for some time along the street. Then he went on:

"They know, understand and enjoy what makes them effective—dress and jewelry, which change in fashion every ten years—but they know nothing of

any subject that requires delicate artistic penetration and a purely æsthetic, impersonal exercise of the senses. Besides, they have very rudimentary senses; the senses of women are not capable of a high degree of training, they are not susceptible to anything that does not appeal directly to their feminine egotism. Their cleverness is that of the savage, the Indian, of combat and trapping. They are even incapable of enjoying lower material delights that require the education and strict attention of a physical organ, such as the palate; and if any exceptions do chance to respect good cookery, they go no farther, for they are incapable of appreciating good wine; that addresses itself only to the gustatory organs of men—for good wine speaks."

He gave a tap of his cane on the pavement, which accentuated the last word and gave point to the sentence, then he went on:

"One must not expect too much of them. But this absence of taste and comprehension, which limits their intellectual vision when it has to do with elevated things, blinds them still more when it has to do with us. To attract them, it is not necessary, as it was in other days, to possess soul, heart, intelligence, or exceptional and high attributes, as when women loved a man for his high-mindedness or his courage. Those of to-day are strolling players, the strolling players of love, repeating the words of a piece which they act from tradition, but which they do not believe in. To act it they need men who are strolling players, too, to complete the lines and to fill out the lying piece."

They walked on some moments in silence, side

by side. Mariolle had listened, mentally repeating the phrases, mutely approving the verdict of his friend with all the grief in his heart. He knew, moreover, that an Italian, Prince Epiati, a sort of adventurer, had come to give fencing lessons in Paris, that he was much spoken of, and that his elegance and supple vigor, exhibited in aristocratic circles and in the cocoterie of the élite, enhanced by a costume of clinging black silk, was monopolizing the attention and the coquettish efforts of the little Baronne de Frémines. As Lamarthe continued to be silent, he said:

"Well, it's our fault! We choose the wrong sort. There must be other kinds of women."

"The only ones capable of love," answered the novelist, "are the shop girls and the sentimental young women of the middle classes, poor or badly married. They are overflowing with sentiment, but such vulgar sentiment that to expose ours to contact with it seems to profane it. Now, what I say is this: That in our class of life, where the women need and desire nothing except to be amused without running any risks, and where the men have subordinated pleasure to the same rules and regulations as work, the old, charming, powerful attraction that caused the sexes to gravitate toward each other has disappeared."

Mariolle murmured: "It is true."

His desire to escape increased—to escape far from these people, these puppets, who because they had nothing to do mimicked the passionate life, beautiful and tender, of other days, incapable of tasting the sweetness of it.

"Good-night," said he, "I am going to bed."
He went in, sat at his table, and wrote:

Adieu, madame. Do you remember my first letter? I said adieu then, but I did not go. What a mistake I made! Need I explain to you why I say this? Men like me never should meet women of your type; if I had been an artist, and if my emotions had been capable of expression in such a manner as to afford me relief, you might have endowed me with inspiration; but, as it is, I am only an unhappy being whom love for you has filled with horrible and unendurable pain. When I first met you I never should have believed myself capable of feeling and suffering in this manner. Any other woman in your place would, in animating my heart, have inspired it with happiness—but you have simply tortured it. I know it is in spite of yourself. I do not reproach you and I bear you no ill-will. I have not even the right to send you these lines; forgive me for doing so. You are so created that you cannot so much as guess at what I experience when I go to see you, when you speak to me, when I look at you. Yes—you consent, you accept me, and you even offer me a calm and peaceful happiness for which I ought to thank you on my knees all my life. But I do not desire it. Ah! what a fate is his who demands of the woman he ardently loves the boon of a fervent word, a passionate caress, and who never receives it! I am famished for want of love, like a poor beggar who has stood in vain with outstretched hand for many weary days at your gates. You have thrown me from time to time costly gifts, but never a morsel of bread, and it was bread, love, that I needed. I am going away, miserable and poor, beggared of your tenderness, a few crumbs of which might have saved me. All I have now in the world is a cruelly haunting thought which I must do my utmost to kill; and this is what I am going away to do. Pardon, thanks, pardon! I love you with my whole soul. Adieu.

ANDRE MARIOLLE.

XI

A CHANGE OF SCENE

A radiant morning was gilding all Paris. Mariolle got into the carriage waiting for him at his door with two trunks and a suitcase behind. He had made his valet pack the night before everything necessary for a long absence, and was leaving as his

provisional address Fontainebleau, Poste-restante. He was going entirely alone, wishing to leave behind everything that could possibly recall Paris.

"Gare de Lyon!" he cried to the driver, and the fiacre started on its way. Then he began to think of that other departure—the leaving for Mont St. Michel last summer; in three months it would be a year since then. But he must not dwell on these thoughts, and he looked out into the street.

The carriage was entering the Avenue des Champs Elysées, bathed in a flood of spring sunlight. The budding leaves, already freed from their brown coverings by the warm weather of the preceding weeks and uninjured by the two days of hail and cold rain, seemed almost visibly to open, so quickly did they unfold on this luminous morning; and Mariolle perceived a subtle odor of sap and growing branches. It was one of those mornings of budding life when one feels that in the public gardens and along the avenues the horse-chestnuts will blossom out in a day or two, the horse-chestnuts like lustres lighting up on chandeliers. Earthly life was in process of awakening all around: even the bituminous pavement seemed to quiver dully, as if upheaved by the stirring roots beneath. Shaken by the jolts of the fiacre, he thought to himself: "At last I am going to have peace of mind. I am going to watch the birth of spring in the forest."

The journey seemed a long one. He was as much unstrung by these few hours of sleeplessness spent in dwelling on his grief as if he had watched for ten nights by the bedside of a dying man. When he got to Fontainebleau he went straight to a notary's office, to ascertain if there was not some

furnished cottage to let near the forest; he was told of several. The one whose photograph attracted him the most had just been vacated by a young couple who had spent the winter at the village of Montigny-sur-Loing. The notary, although a sedate man, smiled, evidently suspecting a love affair. He asked:

"You are alone, monsieur?"

"I am alone."

"No servants, even?"

"No servants, even. I left mine in Paris, and I shall engage some in the neighborhood. I came here wishing to work in perfect isolation."

"Oh, you'll easily have that at this season of the year."

A few moments later, Mariolle and his trunks were in an open landau, on the way to Montigny. The forest was awakening. The tops of the great trees were beginning to be clothed with a dark shadow of green; the underbrush, however, was more advanced, and the birches, with their silver trunks, seemed already in their early summer garb. The immense oaks showed only trembling patches of verdure at the tips of their branches. The beeches, responding still later to the call of spring before opening their pointed buds, were dropping the last dead leaves of the previous autumn. All along the way the grass, not yet shaded by the impenetrable branches, was stiff, shining as if varnished by the new sap, and the odor of nascent vegetation, already noticed by Mariolle in the Champs Elysées that morning, was all around him now, like a bath of germinating life under the vivifying sun. He drew in the air with long breaths, like a captive

just liberated, and with the feeling of a man whose fetters have just been broken, he stretched himself back in the landau, allowing his arms to hang on either side, his hands dropping above the wheels. How good it was to draw in this splendid, free, pure air! He must continue breathing it a long, long time; he would have to do so, in order to saturate himself sufficiently to allay his sufferings, and to feel its grateful zephyrs entering through his lungs and playing soothingly on his heart-wound.

He went through Marlotte, where the driver showed him the "Hôtel Corot," then just opened, whose originality was much spoken of. Then they followed a road commanding the forest on the left, and on the right a great plain, with trees here and there and hills on the horizon. Finally they entered a long village street, a blindingly white street between two rows of little houses roofed with tiles; near one occasionally an enormous lilac covered with blossoms overtopped a wall.

This street followed a valley which descended to the bank of a river. When Mariolle saw it he was delighted; it was a narrow river, rapid, noisy and swirling, on one side washing the walls of gardens, on the other side meadows, with trees whose branches were slowly leafing out.

Mariolle had no trouble in finding the house indicated by the notary, and was charmed with it. It was an old house restored by an artist who had spent five years there; then, having grown tired of it, had rented it. It was very near the river, separated from it only by a garden ending in a terrace bordered by yews. The Loing, which here fell over a dam one or two feet high, ran alongside the ter-

race with loud murmurings. From the windows of the front of the house one could see the meadows on the other side of the river.

"I shall get cured here," thought Mariolle. He had arranged matters with the notary in case he should be pleased with the house, and the driver of the landau returned with his answer. Now he had to see about moving in, which did not take long, the secretary of the mayor sending him two servants, one to cook, the other to look after his linen and to see to the house.

Downstairs there was a parlor, a dining-room, a kitchen and two other small rooms; on the next floor a handsome bedroom and another room which the artist proprietor had made his atelier. All these were beautifully furnished by a man evidently in love with the country and the house; but now the freshness had departed and the house was a little out of order, with a deserted air such as a house wears whose master has abandoned it.

He could tell, however, that it had not been long unoccupied: a sweet odor of verbena clung around it still. Mariolle said to himself: "Aha! verbena! A very simple perfume. The wife of the last tenant was evidently not a woman of extravagant tastes. Happy man!"

Night was approaching, all this business having taken time. He sat down near an open window, drinking in the sweet, humid freshness of the damp grass and watching the setting sun cast long shadows across the meadows.

The voices of the two servants preparing the dinner ascended the stairway, and through the window came the lowing of the cows, the barking of

dogs and the shouts of men driving animals or talking to their friends across the river. Mariolle asked himself for the hundredth time that day: "What did she think when she got my letter? What will she do?" Then he wondered: "What is she doing at this moment?"

He looked at his watch—half-past six. "She has gone home and is receiving."

A vision rose before him of the salon and the young woman chatting with the Princess de Malten, Mme. de Frémines, Massival and the Comte de Bernhaus. His soul at once became filled with rage. He wanted to be there; this was the hour at which he went there every day, and he felt within himself an uneasiness, not a regret, for his determination was unchanged; but a sort of physical uneasiness, akin to that experienced by an opium fiend when he has failed to obtain his dose of the drug at the accustomed hour. He no longer saw the meadows or the sun disappearing behind the hills on the horizon; he only saw her in the midst of friends, engrossed by that worldly life that had robbed him of her.

"I will not think of it any more!" he said aloud.

He got up and went down into the garden, and walked to the terrace. The coolness of the water leaping over the weir arose in mist from the river, and the sensation of the damp cold chilled his already heavy heart and made him retrace his steps. The table was set in the dining-room. He dined quietly; then, having nothing to do, feeling conscious of that uneasiness of soul and body increasing, he went to bed and tried to sleep. But in vain.

His mind saw, his mind suffered, his mind never left that woman.

Who would be the favored one now? The Comte de Bernhaus', no doubt. He was exactly suited to this woman who so loved display, that elegant, distingué man! He must have pleased her, for she had exercised all the wiles at her command upon him, although seeming to love another. Under the obsession of these harassing ideas he nevertheless grew sleepy, and fell into slumberous wanderings in which she and the comte constantly appeared to him. Real sleep refused to come, and all night he saw these two, haunting him, braving and irritating him, disappearing long enough just for him to drop into sleep and then coming back and waking him to feel that awful ache of jealousy in his heart. He got out of bed at the first streak of dawn and went into the forest, cane in hand, a stout cane left behind by a former occupant.

The rising sun gilded the almost bare tops of the oaks, fell on the soft turf visible in spots and on the patches of dead leaves, survivors of the previous year. Yellow butterflies, like little dancing flames, fluttered along the way. A hill, almost a mountain, covered with pines and bluish rocks, appeared on the right side of the road. Mariolle climbed it slowly, and when he had reached the top, sat down on a big stone. He was already panting; his legs refused to carry him, quaking with weakness, his heart palpitated, and all his body seemed aching and bruised. He knew that this did not proceed from fatigue; it came from that love weighing upon him like an intolerable burden, and he moaned: "What misery!"

"The mistress of the house took the arm of the sculptor, to pass into the dining-room."

—Our Hearts, p. 143.

His attention, over-excited and sharpened by the dread of this condition that would perhaps be so difficult to change, now turned to himself, and he searched his soul, looked into his innermost consciousness, trying to understand better what manner of man he was, and to reveal to his own eyes the reason of this inexplicable attack of weakness.

He said to himself:

"I am not a passionate man, nor a dreamer. I have more judgment than instinct, curiosity than appetite, imagination than persistency. At bottom I am merely a fastidious, delicate and intelligent voluptuary. I have enjoyed the good things of this life without attaching myself too strongly to them; have enjoyed them with the discrimination of an expert who tastes but does not become intoxicated, who understands them too well to lose his head over them. I reason over everything, and I, as a rule, analyze my tastes too well to be subjugated by them blindly. This is my great failing, the sole cause of my weakness. And yet, this woman has taken possession of me in spite of myself, in spite of my fear and my knowledge of her; she posseses me just as if she had taken away, one by one, all the different aspirations existing in me.

"I was drawn toward inanimate things; toward music which allures me, nature which softens me, thought which is the epicureanism of the spirit, and toward all that is agreeable and beautiful on earth. Then I encountered a creature who summoned together all my wavering impulses and desires, and, aiming them toward herself, out of them created love. Pretty and graceful, she pleased my eyes; witty and intelligent, she pleased my soul, and she

pleased my heart by a mysterious sympathy experienced in her presence and evolved by contact with her; also by a secret and irresistible sort of magnetism which conquered me just as certain plants stupefy persons who come near them. She has monopolized me completely, for I now aspire to nothing, wish for nothing, desire nothing and care for nothing on earth. Before I knew her, with what delight should I have watched this forest awakening into life! To-day I do not see it, I do not feel it. I am not in it. I am always with this woman whom I wish no longer to love. But I must cease! I must try to chase these thoughts away by fatigue; otherwise, I shall not cure myself."

He got up, descended the rocky hill, and began to walk with long strides. But this obsession weighed him down as if it were a great burden he was carrying. He went on, walking faster and faster, meeting occasionally, when he caught sight of a patch of sunlight on the turf under the branches, or felt a resinous whiff from a clump of fir trees, a brief sensation of comfort, like a presentiment of consolation in the distance. All at once he stopped: "I am not walking, I am fleeing!" He was fleeing, it is true; fleeing, pursued by the anguish of this shattered love. Then he began to walk more quietly. The forest changed its aspect, became more umbrageous, for he was entering that part where beeches predominate. There was no sensation now of winter, just a feeling of spring as fresh and young as if it had only come into being that very day. Mariolle penetrated into the thickets under the gigantic trees which seemed to grow taller and taller. He walked a long time, an hour, two

hours, through the branches and through the innumerable hosts of tiny green, glistening leaves. The great arch of the tops of the trees supported by columns slanting or straight, sometimes whitish, sometimes dark with black moss, veiled the sky now from him. The trees stood one behind the other, in indefinite number, dominating the shrubs at their feet and covering them with thick shade, through which, however, shafts of sunlight managed to percolate. The rays pierced their way in through the foliage, which no longer looked like a wood, but a brilliant, vaporous mass of verdure flecked with luminous gleams.

Mariolle stopped short, seized with inexpressible admiration. Where was he? In a forest, or had he fallen to the bottom of the sea, a sea all leaves and light, an ocean gilded with greenish sunlight?

He felt better, farther from his sorrow, more hidden, calmer, and he lay on the ground on the russet carpet of dead leaves which these trees only part with in gaining their new foliage. Luxuriating in the contact with the fresh, reviving earth and in the pure sweetness of the air, he was soon seized by a desire, at first vague, then more definite, not to be alone in this heavenly spot. He said to himself: "Oh, if she were only here with me!"

Suddenly Mont St. Michel stood before him, and he recalled how different she had been then from what she had been in Paris, in that awakening of love vitalized by the winds from afar, by the neighborhood of the great expanse of yellow sands. It seemed to him as if on that day only she had loved him a little—just for a few hours. Certainly, on the road while they followed the receding tide, in the

cloister when murmuring his name, "André!" she had seemed to say: "I am yours!" On the Chemin des Fous, when he almost held her in his arms in the midst of surrounding, illimitable space, she had felt for him a sort of rapturous feeling that had evaporated when her foot touched the pavement of Paris, and had never returned. But here with him, in this bath of verdure, in this other tide made of new sap, would not the fugitive and sweet emotion felt on the coast of Normandy have re-entered her heart? He lay stretched on his back, lost in thought, his gaze fixed on the great tree-tops above, and little by little he shut his eyes, soothed by the tranquillity of his stately neighbors. At last he dropped off to sleep, and when he awoke and looked at his watch he perceived that it was half-past two.

He got up feeling less sad, less sick at soul, and set off again. Soon he emerged from the thick wood into a large open space, where six incredibly high avenues met like the points of a star, losing themselves in leafy and transparent vistas in emerald-tinted air. A post set forth a placard with the legend: "The King's Bouquet." It was certainly the kingdom of the beeches, and this carrefour was the capital. An empty carriage passed. Mariolle engaged it, and had himself driven to Marlotte, thence back to Montigny, after he had eaten at the inn, for he was hungry.

He recollected having noticed this establishment the day before—the Hôtel Corot, which had just been opened and was mediævally decorated à la "Chat Noir" in Paris. He got down there, and went through an open door into a vast hall where the old-fashioned tables and clumsy stools seemed

to be awaiting roysterers of a bygone century. At the end of the room a woman, a young servant maid, no doubt, standing at the top of a small ladder, was hanging old plates on hooks too high for her to reach. Sometimes poised on the tips of both feet, sometimes on the tip of one, she stretched herself against the wall, with one hand leaning on it, a plate in the other, with graceful and pretty movements, for her waist was small and the undulating line from her wrist to her ankle underwent changing grace at each of her alterations of poise. As her back was turned, she did not hear Mariolle come in. He stopped to look at her, and the remembrance of Prédolé occurred to him.

"Ah! how pretty!" he exclaimed. "She is very supple, that little girl."

He coughed. The girl was so surprised that she nearly fell over, but as soon as she had recovered her equilibrium she jumped to the floor from the top of the ladder with the lightness of a tight-rope dancer, then came smiling toward the customer:

"Monsieur would like?"

"I should like to have breakfast, mademoiselle."

"It would more likely be dinner," she ventured to suggest. "It is half-past three."

"We shall say dinner, then, since you wish it so," he replied. "I have been lost in the forest."

Then she told him what dishes were at the disposition of customers. He made his selection and sat down. She went to give the order, then came back and began to set the table. He followed her with his eyes and found her dainty, neat and quick. Dressed suitably for her work, her sleeves turned up, her neck bare, she had an alert little air that

was pleasant to see, and her corset defined perfectly a little waist of which she was, no doubt, extremely proud. Her rather red face, flushed by the strong country air, appeared too plump, but it had the freshness of a spring flower, with its brilliant brown eyes, wide-open mouth, full of splendid teeth, and chestnut hair whose abundance indicated the vitality of the vigorous young body.

She brought radishes and butter, and he began to eat as she had vanished. Wishing to drown his thoughts, he ordered a bottle of champagne, and drank it all, then two glasses of kümmel after his coffee; then, as he was almost fasting, having eaten nothing before leaving except a little cold meat and bread, he soon felt himself invaded by a sensation of intense giddiness which he took for forgetfulness. His sad thoughts, his grief, his anguish seemed drowned in the wine, which had in that short time transformed his tortured heart into an almost callous one. He went back to Montigny and went to bed at once. But he awoke when it was pitch dark, ill at ease, and worried as if a nightmare, chased away some hours ago, had reappeared furtively to disturb his sleep. Mme. de Burne was there, walking round his bed, with the Comte de Bernhaus.

"Aha!" said he. "I am jealous now; how is that?"

Why was he jealous? He very soon knew why. While he was her lover he knew, in spite of his fears and his torture, that she was true to him; wanting in warmth, in tenderness, but resolutely faithful. Now he had broken away from her, he had given her her liberty—all was over. Would she remain now without a lover? For some time, no

doubt, and then? That very fidelity that had attached her to him until now, had it not had its source in the vague presentiment that if she left him, Mariolle, through weariness, she would be forced after a certain time, longer or shorter, to replace him, not through passion, but because she was tired of solitude, just as she would have sent him away, being tired of him? Do not some women keep their lovers on indefinitely, with resignation, simply through fear of their successor? Besides, to change her lover would not have seemed correct to a woman like her, too intelligent to be swayed by prejudice, but endowed with a delicate moral sense which would protect her from real pollution. Philosophical society woman, not middle-class prude, she did not shrink from a secret attachment, but her fastidious nature would have recoiled with disgust from a succession of lovers.

He had set her at liberty—and now? Now she would certainly take another lover, and it would be the Comte de Bernhaus. Mariolle felt certain of it, and he suffered indescribably. Why had he broken off with her? He had left her, knowing her to be faithful, friendly and charming. Why? Because he was a sensual brute, knowing nothing of love except its physical transports.

Was this really so? Yes; but there was something else besides—there was the fear of suffering. He had fled before the grief of not being loved as he loved; before the cruel divergence that had arisen between them, the unequal tenderness of their kisses, the incurable pain in his heart. He had dreaded the continuance for years of that anguish that had lasted for several weeks seeming like

months. Weak in this, as in everything else, he had shrunk from pain, just as he had all his life shrunk from any great effort. He was incapable of carrying anything to its conclusion, as incapable of immersing himself in passion as he would have been of immersing himself in work, if he had attempted to follow any art or science.

Until day dawned he was a prey to this self-analysis, which worried him like a pack of wolves; then he got up and went down to the riverside. A fisherman was casting his net near the weir. The water whirled round in the light, and when the man drew out his net, to spread it on the broad end of his boat, the little fish glittered through the meshes like quicksilver. Mariolle grew calmer in the morning air, in the steam rising from the waterfall in which danced little rainbows; the current flowing past him seemed to be carrying away some of his grief in its incessant and rapid flow. He said: "Truly I did right. I should have been too wretched."

Returning then to the house, he took a hammock he had noticed in the porch, and, bringing it down to the terrace, hung it between the yews. Throwing himself into it, he tried to think of nothing and watch the water flow by. Breakfast time found him in a sweet torpor, enjoying a physical well-being that communicated itself to his soul, and he lingered over the meal as long as possible to kill time. One expectation worried him—the coming of the mail. He had telegraphed to Paris and written to Fontainebleau, to order his mail to be sent on. Nothing, so far, had come and a feeling of forlornness began to oppress him. But why should it? He could

not expect anything agreeable, consolatory, reassuring in the little black box hanging at the postman's side, nothing but useless invitations and banal communications. Therefore why desire these papers as if the salvation of his soul depended on them? Was it possible that he cherished at the bottom of his soul the vain hope that she would write to him? He asked one of the old servant women:

"At what time does the mail come?"

"At noon, monsieur."

Noon was just at hand. He began to listen to the noises outside with great anxiety. A knock soon sounded on the front door. But the postman only brought some newspapers and three unimportant letters. Mariolle read and reread the papers, grew bored and went out. What would he do? He went toward the hammock and again stretched himself in it. At the end of half an hour an imperious wish to move about took possession of him. Where would he go? To the forest? Yes, the forest was delicious, but the solitude there was even more insistent than here in the house, for there were always noises in the village, and that loneliness, that silence of trees and leaves, filled him with sadness and regret, plunged him into wretchedness. In his revery he went over his long walk of the day before, and when he thought of the little waitress at the Hôtel Corot he said to himself:

"I'll go there and have dinner!"

The idea seemed to cheer him; it would be something to do, would make several hours pass, and he started out at once. The long village street stretched straight out into the valley between two rows of low, white houses, roofed with tiles, some built in a

straight line along the road, others at the end of little yards in which lilac trees flourished, hens scratched in manure heaps, and outside staircases with wooden railings led to doors in the walls. Peasants were slowly working about their houses at different forms of work. He noticed a bent old woman with hair grizzled and yellowish, in spite of her age, for rustics seldom have white hair, dressed in a torn old waist and a scanty woollen skirt that revealed the outline of her thin and bony legs. She looked straight in front of her with eyes that held no spark of intelligence, eyes that had never beheld anything except the few simple objects necessary to her sordid existence. A younger woman was hanging out clothes before her door. The movements of her arms, raising her skirt, showed thick, heavy ankles, and above them bones, large, skinny legs in blue stockings, while her waist and chest, flat and wide as those of a man, revealed a shapeless form repulsive to look upon.

Mariolle said to himself: "Women! Those are women!" The silhouette of Mme. de Burne rose before his eyes. He recalled her, superb in elegance and beauty, a gem of humanity, coquettish and adorned for the eyes of men, and he quivered with the anguish of an irreparable loss. He walked on quickly to try to throw off these thoughts, and when he got to the Hôtel Corot the little maid knew him immediately and said almost familiarly:

"Bonjour, monsieur!"

"Bonjour, mademoiselle."

"Do you wish something to drink?"

"Yes, to begin with; then I shall take dinner here."

They decided first what he should drink, then what

he should eat. He consulted her, so as to make her talk, for she spoke prettily with the crisp Parisian accent and an ease of enunciation as noticeable as her ease of motion. He thought as he listened:

"She is quite pleasing, this young girl. She has the making of a cocotte in her, to my mind." He asked her:

"You are a Parisian?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Have you been here long?"

"A fortnight."

"Do you like it?"

"Not yet, but it is too soon to tell. I am tired of the air of the city and the country is doing me good. That is what decided me to come here. Shall I bring you a glass of vermouth, monsieur?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, and please tell the chef or the cook to look well after my dinner."

"Do not fear, monsieur."

She went out, leaving him alone. He went to a seat near a table in an arbor, where his vermouth was brought to him. He stayed there till the end of the day listening to a thrush in a cage and looking at times at the little maid, who coquetted with him, putting her best foot foremost for this gentleman, who evidently admired her. He went away, as the night before, with a bottle of champagne warming his heart; but the darkness of the way and the coolness of the night soon dissipated this effect and a deep depression entered his soul. He thought: "What shall I do? Shall I stay here? Am I fated to drag out this wretched existence much longer?" and it was late before he slept.

The next day he was swinging in his hammock,

and the sight of the fisherman suggested to him to go fishing. A grocer where he bought a line gave him some instructions on the gentle sport, and offered to guide his first efforts. The proposition was accepted, and from nine to twelve by dint of strict attention and great zeal he succeeded in capturing three small fish.

After his midday meal he set out again for Marlotte. What for? To kill time. The little maid at the hotel began to smile as soon as she caught sight of him. He smiled at her in return, grateful for the recognition, and he tried to get her to talk. More familiar than on the previous day, she chatted with him and told him her name was Elisabeth Ledru. Her mother, a dressmaker, had died the year before; then her father had disappeared. He was a drunkard and had lived for years on the labor of his wife and daughter, and he knew that the girl could not maintain two persons out of her unassisted earnings.

Tired of leading a solitary life, she went to wait in a restaurant, remaining there about a year; then, as she felt tired of the city, she accepted the offer of the founder of the Hôtel Corot to go and wait at table there, with two other young girls who were to arrive later.

This story pleased Mariolle, who, by questioning the girl with skill and treating her like a young lady, learned all about the poor and dark home ruined by the dissolute father. She, a waif without ties, but gay notwithstanding by reason of her youth, feeling the interest taken in her by this stranger to be genuine, spoke to him with confidence and with an expansion that she could no more control than she

could the free motions of her body. He said to her when she had finished:

"And so you wish to be a waitress all your life?"

"I don't know, monsieur. How can I tell what may occur to-morrow?"

"Still it is always best to think of the future."

She looked thoughtful for a moment. Then her face cleared and she said:

"I shall take whatever comes my way!"

They parted good friends. He returned there a few days later, then again, then often, vaguely attracted by the naïve chatter of this girl, which dissipated his gloom to some extent. But when he got back at night to Montigny he had terrible attacks of melancholy. Always with the coming of dawn his heart lightened a little, but as soon as night fell again the fierce jealousy and heartrending regrets would settle on his soul again like evil birds. No news had arrived. He had written to no one and no one had written to him. He knew nothing. So he constantly dwelt on the liaison which he had foreseen would exist between his former mistress and the Comte de Bernhaus. This idea grew more fixed daily. The comte would give her exactly what she wanted: a distingué, assiduous lover, unexacting, satisfied and flattered at being the preferred one of the witty and delicious enchantress. He compared the comte to himself. Bernhaus doubtless would never have those nervous attacks, those fits of impatience, that intense desire for affection that had broken off their liaison. He would be content with very little, being a tactful, discreet man of the world, not manifesting any tendency to strong feeling.

One day in arriving at the Hôtel Corot Mariolle saw in one of the arbors two young men, sitting smoking. The proprietor, a stout man with a broad face, came forward to meet him, for he felt a friendly interest in this faithful customer. He said:

"I have had two new guests come since yesterday, artists."

"Those two gentlemen?"

"Yes. They have already become acquainted. The short one got his second medal last year."

Having communicated all he knew about the artists in embryo, he asked:

"What will you take to-day, monsieur?"

"Send me a vermouth as usual."

Elisabeth soon appeared carrying a tray, with glasses, a decanter and a bottle. When the artists saw her they called out:

"Well, little girl, are you angry still?"

She did not answer, and, when she drew near, Mariolle saw that her eyes were red.

"You have been crying?" he asked.

"Yes, a little," she answered simply.

"What has happened?"

"Those two gentlemen over there behaved badly to me."

"What did they do?"

"They took me for—something which I am not."

"Did you complain to the proprietor?"

She gave an expressive shrug of the shoulders:

"Oh, monsieur! The proprietor! I know him now—the proprietor!"

Mariolle, touched a little and a little irritated, said:

"Tell me all about it."

She described the brutal behavior of the two

blackguards toward her immediately on their arrival. Then she began to cry, saying what would she do without money, friends or resources in this strange place.

"Will you enter my service?" Mariolle proposed suddenly. "You will be well treated in my house, and when I return to Paris you can do what you please."

She looked at him attentively with questioning eyes, then answered all at once:

"I am willing, monsieur."

"What wages do you get here?"

"Sixty francs a month." She added anxiously: "And then I get tips here, too, you know, which brings it up to about seventy."

"I will give you a hundred."

"A hundred francs a month?" she repeated, surprised.

"Yes. Won't that suit you?"

"I should rather think it would!"

"You will only have to wait on me, take care of my clothes and look after my room."

"Very well, monsieur."

"When will you come?"

"To-morrow, if you like. After what has occurred, I shall go to the mayor and oblige the proprietor to let me go."

Mariolle took two louis from his pocket and gave them to her:

"This is for good luck," he said.

A flash of joy illumined her face and she said decidedly:

"I shall be at your house to-morrow, before twelve o'clock, monsieur."

XII

HALF CONSOLED

Elisabeth arrived the next day at Montigny, followed by a countryman carrying her trunk in a wheelbarrow. Mariolle had discharged one of his old women with a handsome present in money to console her, and the new maid took possession of a little room next to the cook's on the second floor. When she presented herself to the master of the house her manner was rather different from what it had been at the Hôtel Corot, less expansive, humbler, since she had become the servant of the gentleman whose humble friend she had been at the Hôtel Corot. He told her in a few words what her duties would be, and she listened attentively and settled down to her work. A week went by without the soul of Mariolle experiencing any change. All he noticed was that he left his home more rarely now, since he had no excuse for walking to Marlotte and that he felt less sad than before. The great passion of his grief subsided, as all transports of this nature must subside; but instead of the turbulence a deep depression of spirits began to possess him, one of those profound states of dejection that resemble a slow and chronic disease that often proves fatal. All his former activity, the interest that he took in the things that had heretofore busied and amused him, died away and was succeeded by a disgust and an apathy which seemed to deprive him of even the strength necessary to go out and take a walk. His greatest distraction now

was to lie in his hammock and look at the Loing flowing by and to watch the fisherman cast his net.

After her first days of shyness and reserve Elisabeth grew bolder a little, and, remarking with her feminine instinct the constant depression of her master, she said one day:

"Monsieur is feeling lonely?"

"Yes, very lonely," he answered resignedly.

"Monsieur should go and take a walk."

"It would not do me any good."

She lavished little secret attentions upon him. Every morning when he entered his parlor he found it full of flowers and fragrant as a hothouse. Elisabeth must have bribed the boys of the village, for they brought her from the forest primroses and violets, and she also got contributions from the gardens in the village. Even though sunk in melancholy, Mariolle could not help noticing this, and felt pleased at the evidence of gratitude evinced by these many little, thoughtful cares.

He thought also that she was growing prettier, more dainty in her dress, that her face had grown paler, and, in consequence, more refined. He observed one day when she was giving him a cup of tea that her hands were no longer those of a maid but those of a lady, the nails carefully trimmed and irreproachably clean. Another time he noticed that her shoes were almost elegant. One afternoon she went upstairs and came down again, soon after, in a charming little gray dress of perfect taste. He cried on seeing her:

"Why, how coquettish you look, Elisabeth!"

She blushed to the roots of her hair and stammered:

"I? Oh, no, monsieur! I am dressing a little better because I have more money."

"When did you buy that dress?"

"I made it myself, monsieur."

"You made it yourself? Why, I always see you working about the house all day long!"

"In the evening, sir."

"But where did you get the material? And who cut it out for you?"

She answered that the shopkeeper at Montigny had brought her some samples from Fontainebleau; she had chosen one and paid for the stuff with the two louis that Mariolle had given her. As far as the cutting and making were concerned, that was the easiest part, as she and her mother had worked for a magasin de confections for years.

He could not help saying:

"It is very becoming to you; you look very nice."

She crimsoned to her eyes. When she had left him he said to himself: "I wonder if she is falling in love with me."

He thought over it, hesitated, doubted, then finished by convincing himself that it was, after all, very possible. He had been kind, helpful and compassionate and almost a friend to her. What was there surprising in this young girl's falling in love with her master, after all he had done for her? The idea, moreover, was not an unpleasant one to dwell upon, the young girl being so very nice, with nothing suggesting a servant in her. His masculine vanity, wounded and crushed by another woman, began to be flattered, soothed, almost comforted.

It was a compensation, a very slight one it was true, almost imperceptible, but it was a compensa-

tion, for, after all, if love comes to any one, no matter who tenders it, it proves that the receiver is capable of inspiring the sentiment. His unconscious egotism was soothed by this. It would occupy his mind, perhaps healthfully, to watch this little heart awakening and commencing to throb for him. It never occurred to him to send the child away, in order to preserve her from the risk of undergoing what had caused his suffering: to have more pity upon her than had been felt for him; compassion seldom accompanies a sentimental triumph.

So he watched her and soon discovered that he was not mistaken, and every day confirmed his opinion. As she brushed against him one morning in waiting on table, he noticed in her clothing a smell of perfume, common perfume, furnished, no doubt, by the local shopkeeper. Then he gave her a bottle of toilet water of a kind that he himself used and always kept a quantity of on hand when away from home; also some cakes of good soap and some dentifrice and rice powder. He thus aided the transformation that became every day more apparent and more complete, noted by him with a watchful and flattered eye. While still scrupulously attentive to her duties and prudent in her conduct, she gradually became éprise, her feminine instinct for captivating developing naïvely. On his part, he was growing by degrees to entertain an attachment for her. He was amused, touched and gratified. He toyed with this budding affection just as one toys with anything that can while away sad hours, but he experienced for her only that vague feeling that impels a man toward any attractive woman, be she a pretty maid-servant or a handsome peasant, a rustic Venus.

What most attracted him in her was her femininity: he longed for that with a confused and irresistible longing, proceeding from his connection with that other woman who had aroused in him that invincible, mysterious quality in a man's nature, the imperious need of the presence, the contact of a woman, that aroma, subtle, ideal or sensual, that is an attribute of every alluring woman, wherever found, be she of the lower orders or of the élite of society, Oriental maid with languorous black eyes or northern siren with eyes of azure—the immemorial attraction of the feminine.

This tender, watchful, incessant attention, more perceptible than visible, seemed to swathe his wounds in a sort of protecting medium that rendered them less sensitive to the recurring attacks of anguish. But the wounds were there, hovering about him like flies around a wound. Since he had forbidden his address to be given, his friends had respected his desire for seclusion, and he was above all tortured by absence of news. From time to time he read in the papers the name of Lamarthe or Massival in the lists of people who had been present at a grand dinner or assisted at some fête. One day he saw a notice of Mme. de Burne appearing as one of the prettiest, most elegant and most superbly dressed of the guests at a ball at the Austrian Embassy. He shivered from head to foot. A little further down the list appeared the name of Comte de Bernhaus; until evening a frantic jealousy lacerated the heart of Mariolle. The suspected liaison was now placed beyond a doubt in his mind. It was one of those worrying, imaginary conclusions that are more harassing than certainties, for one never rids one's self

of them. Able no longer to endure the suspense, he decided to write to Lamarthe, who, knowing him well enough to guess at the misery of his soul, might perhaps enlighten him without being definitely questioned.

One evening, therefore, by candlelight, he composed a letter to him, a long one, cleverly expressed, vaguely sad, full of veiled interrogations and poetical utterances on the beauty of the country in spring. Four days after, on receiving his mail, he recognized at a glance the firm, upright handwriting of the novelist. Lamarthe sent him many details that added to his uneasiness. He spoke of a great many people, and without particularly mentioning Mme. de Burne and the Comte de Bernhaus, he put the two in focus, as it were, by one of those tricks of style peculiar to him, revealing much, yet not betraying that he did so. As a result, the letter confirmed all Mariolle's suspicions: his fears would soon be realized if they were not already so. The life of his old sweetheart was always the same—brilliant, exciting, worldly. He had been missed a little after his disappearance, after the fashion of those who pass away from sight; a little indifferent curiosity was evinced, and he was believed to be in far distant lands, having left Paris because he was weary of it.

After having received this letter he stayed till night, stretched in his hammock. He did not dine; he could not sleep. The next morning he felt so tired, so discouraged, so weary of the monotonous days spent between the dark, mysterious forest and the noisy little river that he stayed in bed.

When Elisabeth came at the sound of his bell and

found him still in bed, she stopped still in the doorway and turned very pale. Then she said:

"Monsieur is ill?"

"Yes, a little."

"Shall I send for the doctor?"

"No; I am subject to these attacks."

"What can I do for monsieur?"

He ordered his daily bath, eggs for his breakfast and tea. But toward one o'clock he was seized with such a violent sensation of ennui that he thought he must get up. Elisabeth, ceaselessly summoned by a whim of the sham invalid, anxious, distressed, wishful to be of use and to suggest something that would do him good, seeing him nervous and restless, offered to read to him, blushing rosy red at her own audacity.

"Can you read well?" he asked.

"Yes, monsieur. At school I always got prizes every year for reading, and I read many novels through to maman—I can remember only their names now."

He felt curious to see, so he sent her to the atelier to fetch his favorite—"Manon Lescant." She helped him to sit up in bed, put two pillows behind his back, took a chair and began. She read well, being endowed with a gift of clear enunciation and intelligent expression. The story interested her from the beginning, and she showed so much feeling as she read it that he made her stop often to talk to her and question her.

Through the open window came the noise of the rushing water mingled with the song of the nightingales and the odors of flowers and trees. André looked at the young girl, whose sparkling eyes followed the story from page to page. She answered

his questions with a comprehension of tenderness and passion—a just comprehension but one modified by her ignorance. He thought to himself: "She would become very witty and intelligent, this little girl, if she were educated."

The feminine charm noticed in her already by him was beneficial to him this warm and quiet afternoon and mingled itself in his mind with the mysterious and powerful charm of that Manon who arouses in our hearts the most peculiar image of any woman created by the human imagination.

He was lulled by her voice, entranced by that well-known but ever new story, and he dreamed of a mistress, capricious and captivating like De Grieux's, unfaithful yet constant, human and tempting even in the midst of her terrible faults, created to evoke in a man all that he was capable of feeling—tenderness and rage, love and passionate hatred, jealousy and desire.

Ah! if she whom he had left had only felt within herself the voluptuous and perfidious love of that passion-provoking courtesan, perhaps he never would have left her! Manon deceived her lover, but she loved him; she lied to him, but she gave herself to him.

XIII

A RECALL

When she appeared before him next morning as she brought in the tea, and their eyes met, she began to tremble so violently that the cup and saucer and

sugar bowl knocked together several times. Mariolle went toward her, took the tray out of her hands, putting it on the table, and said to her as she lowered her eyelids:

"Look at me, petite."

She looked up at him, her lashes wet with tears.

"I don't want you to cry," he said. As he clasped her to him he felt her shiver from head to foot, murmuring: "Oh, mon Dieu!" He saw that it was not sorrow, regret or remorse that made her utter these words, but happiness, pure happiness. He experienced a strange content, physical rather than moral, in feeling nestling on his bosom this little person who truly loved him. He thanked her for her love just as a wounded beggar at the roadside would thank a woman who gave him alms. He thanked her with all that heart famished by the indifference of another woman and lacerated by its futile throbbings.

"Sit down," he said to her.

She sat down. He took her hands, her poor working-girl's hands, now become white and delicate so as to please him, and very gently and with tact he spoke of the attitude they were to henceforth assume toward each other. She was no longer his servant, but would have to retain the appearance of being so, in order to avoid scandal. She would live in the house with him as a housekeeper and would read a great deal to him—this occupation would furnish an excuse for her new position. In a short time, when she was fully established as his reader, she would eat at his table.

When he had finished she answered him simply:

"No, monsieur, I am, and I shall continue to be,

your servant. I don't want any gossip to arise, and I am anxious that what has passed shall remain unknown."

She would not yield the point, although he insisted a good deal, and when he had drunk his tea she carried away the tray, followed by his tender glance. When she had gone he thought:

"This is a woman; all women are equal when they please us. I have made my servant my mistress. Already pretty, she may become charming: anyhow, she is younger and fresher than society women and cocottes. What does it matter after all? Are not many celebrated actresses the daughters of concierges? Yet they are received as ladies, adored as if they were heroines of romance, and princes treat them like sovereigns. Is it on account of their talent, which is in many cases doubtful, or their beauty, very often open to question? No. But a woman takes always the position she is able to command for herself by the illusion she produces."

That day he took a long walk, and, although the same pain gnawed constantly at his heart and his legs were heavy as if grief had destroyed all the springs of his energy, there was existent in him a cheerfulness like the singing of a little bird. He felt less alone, less lost and deserted. The forest appeared less vast, lonely and silent, and he returned at night looking forward to seeing her smiling, her eyes full of tenderness at his entrance.

Then he would go and lie in the hammock, and Elisabeth, sitting on a folding chair, would read to him. Even while listening to and looking at her, he would recall the evenings spent alone in the salon with Mme. de Burne, chatting with her. Then an

overwhelming desire to weep would beset him; his eyelids would become wet, and so intense a regret would tug at his heart that he felt as if he must depart immediately to return to Paris or go away forever.

Seeing him gloomy and depressed, Elisabeth asked him:

"Are you in pain? I feel that you have tears in your eyes."

"Kiss me, little one; you would not understand."

She kissed him, feeling uneasy, suspecting some story that she had not heard; and he, soothed by her caresses a little, thought: "Ah! what a woman would be created in the combination of these two, uniting the affection of the one with the charm of the other. How is it that one never finds the realization of one's ideal—never attains higher than the 'almost'?" He mused vaguely, lulled by the monotonous sound of her voice, to which he was not listening, thinking of all that had allured and vanquished him in the mistress he had forsaken. He said to himself, under the obsession of her memory, of her imaginary presence by which he was haunted as men beset by visions are by phantoms: "Am I fated never to be delivered from her?"

He began again to take long walks, to wander about the thicket, with the vague hope of losing her somewhere, at the bottom of a ravine, behind a rock, in some thicket, like a man who, in order to rid himself of some unfortunate dog which he is reluctant to kill, will try to lose him on a journey.

One day in one of these walks he returned by the country of the beeches. By this time it was a gloomy forest, almost dark with the impenetrable foliage.

He walked under the immense vault, formed by the overarching branches, regretting the scanty verdure of the spring, so penetrated by the golden sunbeams sifting through, and, as he turned into a narrow path, he stopped, struck with astonishment, before two trees entangled in each other's embrace. No more vivid symbol of his love had ever met his eyes: a beautiful and vigorous beech strangling a tall oak tree.

Like a desperate lover with a powerful but tortured body the beech threw two formidable arms around the trunk of the oak, closing them around it. The other, held in this embrace, raised high in the heavens its proud head, as if in disdain. But, in spite of this flight toward space, this haughty aloofness, it bore in its trunk two great, deep scars that had long ago cicatrized. The branches beneath the scars had become an integral part of the tree, and the two, oak and beech, united forever, mingled their sap, and in the veins of the outraged tree it mounted to the great high top in the waving leaves.

Mariolle sat down so as to look at them for a long time. The sight of these trees appeared to his morbid soul a true symbol of his love—these two wrestlers motionless in the heart of the forest.

Then he got up and set off sadder than ever. Suddenly, as he went along, his eyes bent on the ground, he saw hidden in the grass, dirty with mud and the rain of weeks ago, a telegram lost or thrown away by some passerby. He stopped. What sweet or painful message had the rumpled blue paper carried to some heart?

He could not help picking it up; with curious hands he unfolded it. It was almost illegible, but he

made out this much of the writing: "Come . . . at four . . . me . . ." The names had been effaced by the wet.

Recollections both cruel and delicious arose to his mind, of all the despatches he had received from her—now to appoint the time of the rendezvous—now to tell him that she could not come. Never had any object raised such emotion in his heart, made him tremble so violently, made his poor heart stop and bound again like the sight of these blissful or desolating despatches. He felt almost prostrated with woe at the idea that never again would he receive one from her. Again he asked himself what could have happened to her since he left her. Had she suffered, regretted the friend driven away by her indifference, or was she simply wounded in her vanity? His desire to find out became so violent, so insistent that an audacious idea came to him. He went to Fontainebleau and found out the telegraph office. His soul was shaken by vacillation and anxiety, but a force seemed to be dominating him—an irresistible force emanating from his heart.

He took with a trembling hand a telegraph form from the table, and, after putting the name and address of Mme. de Burne, wrote the following message:

I want so much to know what you are thinking of me. I can forget nothing.

ANDRÉ MARIOLLE.

Montigny.

He went out afterward, took a carriage and went back to Montigny, troubled and tormented at what he had done, regretting it already.

He had calculated that if she vouchsafed an an-

swer he would get a letter in two days, but did not leave his cottage till the next day, fearing that a despatch might come. He was swinging in the hammock between the yews at about three the next afternoon when Elisabeth came to tell him that a lady wished to speak to him.

The shock was so great that he felt a short sensation of choking, and he went toward the house, his legs shaking and his heart palpitating. He did not think, however, that it could be she. When he had opened the door of the salon, Mme. de Burne, seated on a sofa, rose and, smiling a rather reserved smile, a slight constraint visible in her face and attitude, held out her hand to him, saying:

"I have come to get some news of you, the telegram not having given complete details."

He had grown so pale at seeing her that her eyes shone with joy at perceiving it; and he remained so oppressed with emotion that he could not speak for some time and could only hold to his lips the hand she held out to him.

"Dieu! how good you are!" said he at last.

"No, but I do not forget my friends, and I worry about them."

She looked him full in the face with that first glance of a woman that takes all in, penetrates every thought to its source and brushes away all disguises. She was no doubt satisfied, for her face cleared and she smiled.

"Your hermitage is pretty," she said. "Are you happy here?"

"No, madame."

"Is it possible! In this pretty country near the lovely forest and on the bank of this charming

little river! You ought to be quiet and absolutely happy here."

"No, madame."

"Why not?"

"Because one does not forget."

"Is it indispensable that you should forget something so as to be happy?"

"Yes, madame."

"May I ask what?"

"You know."

"And what then?"

"I am perfectly miserable."

"I guessed that when I received your telegram," she answered, "and that is why I came; with the determination to go away at once if I were mistaken." After a short pause she added: "Since I am not returning immediately, may I go over your place? There is a little path between the lime-trees there that looks very delightful—it must be cooler there than in the salon."

They went out. She wore a mauve toilet that harmonized so exquisitely with the verdure of the trees and the blueness of the sky that she bewildered him as much as would an apparition; looking so pretty in a new and alluring manner. Her long, supple waist, her delicate and fresh face, the blond fire of her hair, under a large mauve hat that formed a nimbus with a long ostrich plume surrounding it, her thin arms with the two hands crossed in front carrying her closed umbrella, and her bearing, rather upright and proud, brought into this little rustic garden something abnormal, exotic, unexpected, the bizarre suggestion of some figure out of a story, a dream, a Watteau picture; a creation evolved from

the brain of a poet or a painter who had taken an excursion into the country to show, at the bidding of a sudden caprice, how beautiful she was. Marirolle, in looking at her, quivering with all his revived passion, recalled the two peasant women he had seen when he was walking through Montigny. She asked him: "Who is that young person who opened the door to me?"

"My servant."

"She does not look like a servant."

"No. She is extremely nice."

"Where did you get her?"

"Quite near here, in a hotel frequented by artists."

"You made a good selection."

"To my own advantage, certainly, for I much prefer seeing a pretty face to an ugly one around me."

"That is the only feeling with which she has inspired you?"

"She perhaps inspired me with an irresistible desire to see you again, for any woman who attracts my eyes, if only for a second, sends my thoughts back to you."

"That is a very skillful way of getting out of it. Does she love her preserver?"

He reddened still more painfully. Like a flash the idea came to him that jealousy is a good stimulant for the heart, and he determined to utter only a half lie. So he replied hesitatingly:

"I don't know anything about that. It is possible. She is very attentive to me and looks after me well."

An imperceptible annoyance impelled Mme. de Burne to murmur:

"And you?"

He fixed his eyes, burning with love, on her, and answered:

"Nothing could tempt me from you."

This was again very skillful, but she no longer thought of that. His utterance seemed to her the expression of an indubitable truth. How could a woman like her doubt such an avowal? She certainly did not doubt it, and, satisfied, she worried herself no more about Elisabeth.

They seated themselves on two folding chairs in the shadow of the lime-trees, above the flowing water.

"What could you have thought of me?" he asked.

"That you were very unhappy."

"Through my fault or yours?'

"Through our fault. Then, knowing you to be very excitable, very intense, it struck me that the most sensible thing to do would be to let you come to yourself. And so I waited."

"What were you waiting for?"

"A word from you. I received it, and here I am. Now let us talk like sensible people. So you still love me? I do not ask you this as a coquette, but in the character of a friend."

"I love you still."

"And what are your intentions?"

"I do not know. I am in your hands."

"Oh, I—I have very definite ideas, but I shall not impart them until I know yours. Let us speak of you, of what took place in your heart and in your mind since you went away."

"I thought of you and did scarcely anything else."

"Yes, but how, in what way and with what result?"

He related his determination to be cured of his love for her, his flight, his arrival in the great forest where he saw nothing around him but her; told of his days haunted by memories, his nights made wretched by jealousy. He told all in good faith, except the love of Elisabeth, whose name was not mentioned.

Mme. de Burne listened, convinced of the truth of all he said, more certain of it through the belief she entertained in the power she wielded over Mariolle than assured by the sincerity of his voice and manner. She was overjoyed at her triumph at receiving him back, for she really was sincerely fond of him.

Then he lamented anew this hopeless situation, and growing excited in speaking about what he had undergone, he reproached her with impassioned, poetic enthusiasm, but with no rancor or bitterness for the incapacity for love with which she was cursed.

"Some are denied the gift of pleasing," he said in ending. "To you the gift of loving is denied."

She interrupted him animatedly, full of reasons and argument.

"At least I have the gift of constancy," she broke in. "Would you be less unhappy if after having loved you for ten months I were to-day in love with another?"

"Is it impossible for a woman to love only one man?"

"One cannot love at will; one can always be faithful," she answered quickly. "Do you imagine that

the delirious exaltation of the senses can last for several years? With the majority of women, passionate women, who take caprices lasting a longer or a shorter time, life is nothing but a long romance; the heroes, the circumstances, the dénoûments change; it is an amusement and a distraction for them, I must confess, for the emotions of the beginning, middle and end are changed each time. But when it is finished it is finished—for the man. You understand?"

"Yes, that is true, to some extent. But I do not see your drift."

"It is this. No great, burning, torturing passion can exist for a long time—like yours from which you suffer. It is a phase which I have made very painful to you, I know and feel it, through my lack of tenderness and my incapability of expansion. But this phase of feeling you are undergoing will pass—it cannot last eternally."

She stopped. He asked anxiously:

"And then?"

"Then I consider that for a calm and reasonable woman like me you will make a very agreeable lover, for you have plenty of tact. But you would be an atrocious husband. However, there are not, there cannot be, any good husbands."

He asked, surprised, a little vexed:

"Why keep a lover whom you no longer care for or never really loved?"

"I do love in my own fashion, mon ami," she answered. "I love calmly, but I love."

"You have, above all," he replied resignedly, "the desire that one should love you and that he should show that he loves you."

"That's true," she answered. "I adore that. But my heart needs a secret companion. That vain love of public homage does not prevent me from being faithful and devoted and believing that I am capable of bestowing upon a man something of myself that no other could have—my loyal affection, the secret attachment of my heart, the absolute and secret confidence of my soul; and, in return, receiving from him with all his lover-like tenderness the rare and sweet feeling that I am not alone. It is not, perhaps, love as you understand it; but it is worth something."

He bent toward her, trembling with feeling and stammering:

"Are you willing that I should be that man?"

"Yes, a little later, when you are suffering less. In the meantime be resigned to a little torture occasionally through your companionship with me. That will pass over. Since you experience pain in any case, it is better to feel it near me than far away, is it not?"

Her smile seemed to say: "Do have a little confidence in me," and as she saw him vibrating with passion, she felt throughout her being a sort of contentment that made her happy after her own fashion, just as a hunter is happy when a long-desired prey is struggling in the trap he set.

"When do you return?" she asked.

"Why, to-morrow," he answered.

"All right—to-morrow let it be. Will you take dinner with me?"

"Yes, madame."

"I must go soon," she remarked, looking at the watch set in the handle of her umbrella.

"Oh! Why so soon?"

"Because I must catch the five o'clock train. Some people are coming to dinner: the Princess de Malten, Bernhaus, Lamarthe, Massival, Maltry and a new acquaintance, M. de Charlaine, the explorer, just back from upper Cambodia after a wonderful journey. He is the rage just now."

Mariolle experienced a sudden pang at his heart. All the names she had mentioned, one after the other, hurt him like the stings of a wasp. They contained poison.

"Then," said he, "shall we start at once and take a drive through the forest?"

"That will be very nice. But won't you offer me first a cup of tea and some toast?"

When it was time to serve the tea Elisabeth could not be found.

"She has gone out to take a walk," the cook said.

Mme. de Burne was not surprised at this. What fear, anyhow, could this maid servant inspire in her now? They got into the landau waiting before the door, and Mariolle made the driver take a road which was longer, but which took in the Gorge-aux-Loups. As they drove along under the high foliage, enjoying its calm shade, breathing in its freshness, she said, struck by the inexpressible sensation with which the powerful and mysterious beauty of the earth influences the flesh through the eyes: "Dieu! How nice it is here! How beautiful and restful!"

She drew a long breath with the emotion of a shriven communicant, mingled with happiness, feeling penetrated with languor and tender yearning. She placed her hand on that of André.

But he thought: "Ah! yes. Nature again! Just as at Mont St. Michel." For, before his eyes, in a

vision, passed a train going to Paris. He took her to the station. On leaving him she said: "To-morrow, then, at eight."

"To-morrow at eight, madame."

Smiling radiantly, she left him, and he returned home in the landau, satisfied, happy, but always possessed by that haunting uneasiness, for the end was not yet.

But why struggle? It was of no use. She attracted him by a charm which he could not understand, stronger than any power he had ever encountered. To flee from her availed nothing; it only made him suffer intolerably, while, if he were patient and resigned, he would have from her at least all that she promised, for she did not lie.

The horses trotted under the trees, and he remembered that all through their interview she had never once had the idea, the impulse to tender him her lips. She was always the same; nothing would change her, and he would perhaps always suffer in the same manner through her. The recollection of the unhappy hours he had passed in the unbearable certainty that he could never touch her heart darkened his soul once more, made him dread and foresee similar misery in the future. However, he was determined to suffer all rather than to lose her again, resigned to that eternal longing that had become a sort of fierce appetite, never to be assuaged, a fire that consumed his flesh.

But when he got home and found that the young girl had not come back he felt anxious and said to the other servant:

"You are sure she went out?"

"Yes, monsieur."

He went out too, hoping that he might meet her. When he had gone a few steps, before turning into the long street that went along the valley, he saw an old church, wide and low, surmounted by a short steeple, squatting on a small eminence, and from this overlooking the village, like a hen watching over her chickens.

A suspicion, a presentiment, impelled him to enter. Who could fathom the strange suspicions that may arise in the heart of a woman? What had she heard? What had she understood? Where would she be more likely to go than to the church, if an inkling of the truth had penetrated her mind?

The interior of the church was very dark, for night was falling. Only the little lamp was visible at the end of its thread, revealing in the tabernacle the ideal presence of the Divine Consoler. Mariolle passed with light steps along the benches. When he drew near the choir he saw a woman kneeling, her face in her hands. There was no one else in the church. He approached, and seeing it was Elisabeth, touched her on the shoulder. She started violently and turned her head. Then he saw that she was crying.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"I understood," she answered. "You are here because she made you unhappy; and she came to fetch you."

He stammered, overcome by the sorrow that he now felt in his turn.

"You are mistaken, petite," he replied. "I am, it is true, returning to Paris, but I shall take you with me."

"Oh, no! It is not true! It is not true!" she cried, incredulous.

"I swear it to you," he said solemnly.

"When?"

"To-morrow."

Beginning to sob low, she moaned: "Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" He took her by the waist and led her out, made her go down the hill, now covered by night, and when they had reached the river bank he seated her on the grass and sat beside her. He listened to her heart beating and her breath catching, and, struck with remorse, straining her to him, he spoke tender words in her ear, such as he had never uttered to her before. Softened by pity and burning with desire, he scarcely departed from the truth and he did not deceive her. Astonished at what he felt, he asked himself how it was possible that, still thrilling from the presence of that other whose slave he must ever remain, he could thus tremble with passion and emotion in consoling this girl's grief.

"I love you so much. You are all I have in the world."

He answered, returning her caresses: "Dear little girl!"

Already she had almost forgotten the existence of that stranger whose appearance had that afternoon caused her such sharp grief. But a sort of half-conscious doubt floated in her mind, and she whispered in a coaxing voice:

"Truly you will always love me as you love me here?"

He answered firmly:

"I shall always love you as I love you here!"

THE END

THE LANCER'S WIFE

I

IT was after Bourbaki's defeat in the east of France. The army, broken up, decimated, and worn out, had been obliged to retreat into Switzerland after that terrible campaign, and it was only its short duration that saved a hundred and fifty thousand men from certain death. Hunger, the terrible cold, forced marches in the snow without boots, over bad mountain roads, had caused us *francs-tireurs,* especially, the greatest suffering, for we were without tents, and almost without food, always in the van when we were marching toward Belfort, and in the rear when returning by the Jura. Of our little band that had numbered twelve hundred men on the first of January, there remained only twenty-two pale, thin, ragged wretches, when we at length succeeded in reaching Swiss territory.

There we were safe, and could rest. Everybody knows what sympathy was shown to the unfortunate French army, and how well it was cared for. We all gained fresh life, and those who had been rich and happy before the war declared that they had never experienced a greater feeling of comfort than they did then. Just think. We actually had something to eat every day, and could sleep every night.

Meanwhile, the war continued in the east of France, which had been excluded from the armistice. Besançon still kept the enemy in check, and the latter had their revenge by ravaging Franche Comté. Sometimes we heard that they had approached quite close to the frontier, and we saw Swiss troops, who were to form a line of observation between us and them, set out on their march.

That pained us in the end, and, as we regained health and strength, the longing to fight took possession of us. It was disgraceful and irritating to know that within two or three leagues of us the Germans were victorious and insolent, to feel that we were protected by our captivity, and to feel that on that account we were powerless against them.

One day our captain took five or six of us aside, and spoke to us about it, long and furiously. He was a fine fellow, that captain. He had been a sub-lieutenant in the zouaves, was tall and thin and as hard as steel, and during the whole campaign he had cut out their work for the Germans. He fretted in inactivity, and could not accustom himself to the idea of being a prisoner and of doing nothing.

"Confound it!" he said to us, "does it not pain you to know that there is a number of uhlans within two hours of us? Does it not almost drive you mad to know that those beggarly wretches are walking about as masters in our mountains, when six determined men might kill a whole spitful any day? I cannot endure it any longer, and I must go there."

"But how can you manage it, captain?"

"How? It is not very difficult! Just as if we had not done a thing or two within the last six months, and got out of woods that were guarded by

very different men from the Swiss. The day that you wish to cross over into France, I will undertake to get you there."

"That may be; but what shall we do in France without any arms?"

"Without arms? We will get them over yonder, by Jove!"

"You are forgetting the treaty," another soldier said; "we shall run the risk of doing the Swiss an injury, if Manteuffel learns that they have allowed prisoners to return to France."

"Come," said the captain, "those are all bad reasons. I mean to go and kill some Prussians; that is all I care about. If you do not wish to do as I do, well and good; only say so at once. I can quite well go by myself; I do not require anybody's company."

Naturally we all protested, and, as it was quite impossible to make the captain alter his mind, we felt obliged to promise to go with him. We liked him too much to leave him in the lurch, as he never failed us in any extremity; and so the expedition was decided on.

II

The captain had a plan of his own, that he had been cogitating over for some time. A man in that part of the country whom he knew was going to lend him a cart and six suits of peasants' clothes. We could hide under some straw at the bottom of the wagon, which would be loaded with Gruyère cheese, which he was supposed to be going to sell in France. The captain told the sentinels that he was

taking two friends with him to protect his goods, in case any one should try to rob him, which did not seem an extraordinary precaution. A Swiss officer seemed to look at the wagon in a knowing manner, but that was in order to impress his soldiers. In a word, neither officers nor men could make it out.

"Get up," the captain said to the horses, as he cracked his whip, while our three men quietly smoked their pipes. I was half suffocated in my box, which only admitted the air through those holes in front, and at the same time I was nearly frozen, for it was terribly cold.

"Get up," the captain said again, and the wagon loaded with Gruyère cheese entered France.

The Prussian lines were very badly guarded, as the enemy trusted to the watchfulness of the Swiss. The sergeant spoke North German, while our captain spoke the bad German of the Four Cantons, and so they could not understand each other. The sergeant, however, pretended to be very intelligent; and, in order to make us believe that he understood us, they allowed us to continue our journey; and, after travelling for seven hours, being continually stopped in the same manner, we arrived at a small village of the Jura in ruins, at nightfall.

What were we going to do? Our only arms were the captain's whip, our uniforms our peasants' blouses, and our food the Gruyère cheese. Our sole wealth consisted in our ammunition, packages of cartridges which we had stowed away inside some of the large cheeses. We had about a thousand of them, just two hundred each, but we needed rifles, and they must be chassepots. Luckily,

however, the captain was a bold man of an inventive mind, and this was the plan that he hit upon:

While three of us remained hidden in a cellar in the abandoned village, he continued his journey as far as Besançon with the empty wagon and one man. The town was invested, but one can always make one's way into a town among the hills by crossing the tableland till within about ten miles of the walls, and then following paths and ravines on foot. They left their wagon at Omans, among the Germans, and escaped out of it at night on foot, so as to gain the heights which border the River Doubs; the next day they entered Besançon, where there were plenty of chassepots. There were nearly forty thousand of them left in the arsenal, and General Roland, a brave marine, laughed at the captain's daring project, but let him have six rifles and wished him "good luck." There he had also found his wife, who had been through all the war with us before the campaign in the East, and who had been only prevented by illness from continuing with Bourbaki's army. She had recovered, however, in spite of the cold, which was growing more and more intense, and in spite of the numberless privations that awaited her, she persisted in accompanying her husband. He was obliged to give way to her, and they all three, the captain, his wife, and our comrade, started on their expedition.

Going was nothing in comparison to returning. They were obliged to travel by night, so as to avoid meeting anybody, as the possession of six rifles would have made them liable to suspicion. But, in spite of everything, a week after leaving us, the

captain and his two men were back with us again. The campaign was about to begin.

III

The first night of his arrival he began it himself, and, under pretext of examining the surrounding country, he went along the high road.

I must tell you that the little village which served as our fortress was a small collection of poor, badly built houses, which had been deserted long before. It lay on a steep slope, which terminated in a wooded plain. The country people sell the wood; they send it down the slopes, which are called *coulées,* locally, and which lead down to the plain, and there they stack it into piles, which they sell thrice a year to the wood merchants. The spot where this market is held in indicated by two small houses by the side of the highroad, which serve for public houses. The captain had gone down there by way of one of these *coulées.*

He had been gone about half an hour, and we were on the lookout at the top of the ravine, when we heard a shot. The captain had ordered us not to stir, and only to come to him when we heard him blow his trumpet. It was made of a goat's horn, and could be heard a league off; but it gave no sound, and, in spite of our cruel anxiety, we were obliged to wait in silence, with our rifles by our side.

It is nothing to go down these *coulées;* one just lets one's self slide down; but it is more difficult to get up again; one has to scramble up by catching hold of the hanging branches of the trees, and some-

times on all fours, by sheer strength. A whole mortal hour passed, and he did not come; nothing moved in the brushwood. The captain's wife began to grow impatient. What could he be doing? Why did he not call us? Did the shot that we had heard proceed from an enemy, and had he killed or wounded our leader, her husband? They did not know what to think, but I myself fancied either that he was dead or that his enterprise was successful; and I was merely anxious and curious to know what he had done.

Suddenly we heard the sound of his trumpet, and we were much surprised that instead of coming from below, as we had expected, it came from the village behind us. What did that mean? It was a mystery to us, but the same idea struck us all, that he had been killed, and that the Prussians were blowing the trumpet to draw us into an ambush. We therefore returned to the cottage, keeping a careful lookout, with our fingers on the trigger, and hiding under the branches; but his wife, in spite of our entreaties, rushed on, leaping like a tigress. She thought that she had to avenge her husband, and had fixed the bayonet to her rifle, and we lost sight of her at the moment that we heard the trumpet again; and, a few moments later, we heard her calling out to us:

"Come on! come on! He is alive! It is he!"

We hastened on, and saw the captain smoking his pipe at the entrance of the village, but strangely enough, he was on horseback.

"Ah! ah!" he said to us, "you see that there is something to be done here. Here I am on horseback already; I knocked over an uhlan yonder, and took

his horse; I suppose they were guarding the wood, but it was by drinking and swilling in clover. One of them, the sentry at the door, had not time to see me before I gave him a sugarplum in his stomach, and then, before the others could come out, I jumped on the horse and was off like a shot. Eight or ten of them followed me, I think; but I took the cross-roads through the woods. I have got scratched and torn a bit, but here I am, and now, my good fellows, attention, and take care! Those brigands will not rest until they have caught us, and we must receive them with rifle bullets. Come along; let us take up our posts!"

We set out. One of us took up his position a good way from the village on the crossroads; I was posted at the entrance of the main street, where the road from the level country enters the village, while the two others, the captain and his wife, were in the middle of the village, near the church, whose tower served for an observatory and citadel.

We had not been in our places long before we heard a shot, followed by another, and then two, then three. The first was evidently a chassepot—one recognized it by the sharp report, which sounds like the crack of a whip—while the other three came from the lancers' carbines.

The captain was furious. He had given orders to the outpost to let the enemy pass and merely to follow them at a distance if they marched toward the village, and to join me when they had gone well between the houses. Then they were to appear suddenly, take the patrol between two fires, and not allow a single man to escape; for, posted as we

were, the six of us could have hemmed in ten Prussians, if needful.

"That confounded Piédelot has roused them," the captain said, "and they will not venture to come on blindfolded any longer. And then I am quite sure that he has managed to get a shot into himself somewhere or other, for we hear nothing of him. It serves him right; why did he not obey orders?" And then, after a moment, he grumbled in his beard: "After all, I am sorry for the poor fellow; he is so brave, and shoots so well!"

The captain was right in his conjectures. We waited until evening, without seeing the uhlans; they had retreated after the first attack; but unfortunately we had not seen Piédelot, either. Was he dead or a prisoner? When night came, the captain proposed that we should go out and look for him, and so the three of us started. At the cross-roads we found a broken rifle and some blood, while the ground was trampled down; but we did not find either a wounded man or a dead body, although we searched every thicket, and at midnight we returned without having discovered anything of our unfortunate comrade.

"It is very strange," the captain growled. "They must have killed him and thrown him into the bushes somewhere; they cannot possibly have taken him prisoner, as he would have called out for help. I cannot understand it at all." Just as he said that, bright flames shot up in the direction of the inn on the high road, which illuminated the sky.

"Scoundrels! cowards!" he shouted. "I will bet that they have set fire to the two houses on the marketplace, in order to have their revenge, and then

they will scuttle off without saying a word. They will be satisfied with having killed a man and set fire to two houses. All right. It shall not pass over like that. We must go for them; they will not like to leave their illuminations in order to fight."

"It would be a great stroke of luck if we could set Piédelot free at the same time," some one said.

The five of us set off, full of rage and hope. In twenty minutes we had got to the bottom of the *coulée,* and had not yet seen any one when we were within a hundred yards of the inn. The fire was behind the house, and all we saw of it was the reflection above the roof. However, we were walking rather slowly, as we were afraid of an ambush, when suddenly we heard Piédelot's well-known voice. It had a strange sound, however; for it was at the same time dull and vibrating, stifled and clear, as if he were calling out as loud as he could with a bit of rag stuffed into his mouth. He seemed to be hoarse and gasping, and the unlucky fellow kept exclaiming: "Help! Help!"

We sent all thoughts of prudence to the devil, and in two bounds we were at the back of the inn, where a terrible sight met our eyes.

IV

Piédelot was being burned alive. He was writhing in the midst of a heap of fagots, tied to a stake, and the flames were licking him with their burning tongues. When he saw us, his tongue seemed to stick in his throat; he drooped his head, and seemed as if he were going to die. It was only the affair of

a moment to upset the burning pile, to scatter the embers, and to cut the ropes that fastened him.

Poor fellow! In what a terrible state we found him. The evening before he had had his left arm broken, and it seemed as if he had been badly beaten since then, for his whole body was covered with wounds, bruises and blood. The flames had also begun their work on him, and he had two large burns, one on his loins and the other on his right thigh, and his beard and hair were scorched. Poor Piédelot!

No one knows the terrible rage we felt at this sight! We would have rushed headlong at a hundred thousand Prussians; our thirst for vengeance was intense. But the cowards had run away, leaving their crime behind them. Where could we find them now? Meanwhile, however, the captain's wife was looking after Piédelot, and dressing his wounds as best she could, while the captain himself shook hands with him excitedly, and in a few minutes he came to himself.

"Good-morning, captain; good-morning, all of you," he said. "Ah! the scoundrels, the wretches! Why, twenty of them came to surprise us."

"Twenty, do you say?"

"Yes; there was a whole band of them, and that is why I disobeyed orders, captain, and fired on them, for they would have killed you all, and I preferred to stop them. That frightened them, and they did not venture to go farther than the cross-roads. They were such cowards. Four of them shot at me at twenty yards, as if I had been a target, and then they slashed me with their swords. My

arm was broken, so that I could only use my bayonet with one hand."

"But why did you not call for help?"

"I took good care not to do that, for you would all have come; and you would neither have been able to defend me nor yourselves, being only five against twenty."

"You know that we should not have allowed you to have been taken, poor old fellow."

"I preferred to die by myself, don't you see! I did not want to bring you here, for it would have been a mere ambush."

"Well, we will not talk about it any more. Do you feel rather easier?"

"No, I am suffocating. I know that I cannot live much longer. The brutes! They tied me to a tree, and beat me till I was half dead, and then they shook my broken arm; but I did not make a sound. I would rather have bitten my tongue out than have called out before them. Now I can tell what I am suffering and shed tears; it does one good. Thank you, my kind friends."

"Poor Piédelot! But we will avenge you, you may be sure!"

"Yes, yes; I want you to do that. There is, in particular, a woman among them who passes as the wife of the lancer whom the captain killed yesterday. She is dressed like a lancer, and she tortured me the most yesterday, and suggested burning me; and it was she who set fire to the wood. Oh! the wretch, the brute! Ah! how I am suffering! My loins, my arms!" and he fell back gasping and exhausted, writhing in his terrible agony, while the captain's wife wiped the perspiration from his fore-

head, and we all shed tears of grief and rage, as if we had been children. I will not describe the end to you; he died half an hour later, previously telling us in what direction the enemy had gone. When he was dead we gave ourselves time to bury him, and then we set out in pursuit of them, with our hearts full of fury and hatred.

"We will throw ourselves on the whole Prussian army, if it be necessary," the captain said; "but we will avenge Piédelot. We must catch those scoundrels. Let us swear to die, rather than not to find them; and if I am killed first, these are my orders: All the prisoners that you take are to be shot immediately, and as for the lancer's wife, she is to be tortured before she is put to death."

"She must not be shot, because she is a woman," the captain's wife said. "If you survive, I am sure that you would not shoot a woman. Torturing her will be quite sufficient; but if you are killed in this pursuit, I want one thing, and that is to fight with her; I will kill her with my own hands, and the others can do what they like with her if she kills me."

"We will outrage her! We will burn her! We will tear her to pieces! Piédelot shall be avenged! An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth!"

V

The next morning we unexpectedly fell on an outpost of uhlans four leagues away. Surprised by our sudden attack, they were not able to mount their horses, nor even to defend themselves; and in a few moments we had five prisoners, corresponding

to our own number. The captain questioned them, and from their answers we felt certain that they were the same whom we had encountered the previous day. Then a very curious operation took place. One of us was told off to ascertain their sex, and nothing can describe our joy when we discovered what we were seeking among them, the female executioner who had tortured our friend.

The four others were shot on the spot, with their backs to us and close to the muzzles of our rifles; and then we turned our attention to the woman. What were we going to do with her? I must acknowledge that we were all of us in favor of shooting her. Hatred, and the wish to avenge Piédelot, had extinguished all pity in us, and we had forgotten that we were going to shoot a woman, but a woman reminded us of it, the captain's wife; at her entreaties, therefore, we determined to keep her a prisoner.

The captain's poor wife was to be severely punished for this act of clemency.

The next day we heard that the armistice had been extended to the eastern part of France, and we had to put an end to our little campaign. Two of us, who belonged to the neighborhood, returned home, so there were only four of us, all told: the captain, his wife, and two men. We belonged to Besançon, which was still being besieged in spite of the armistice.

"Let us stop here," said the captain. "I cannot believe that the war is going to end like this. The devil take it! Surely there are men still left in France; and now is the time to prove what they are made of. The spring is coming on, and the armis-

tice is only a trap laid for the Prussians. During the time that it lasts, a new army will be raised, and some fine morning we shall fall upon them again. We shall be ready, and we have a hostage—let us remain here."

We fixed our quarters there. It was terribly cold, and we did not go out much, and somebody had always to keep the female prisoner in sight.

She was sullen, and never said anything, or else spoke of her husband, whom the captain had killed. She looked at him continually with fierce eyes, and we felt that she was tortured by a wild longing for revenge. That seemed to us to be the most suitable punishment for the terrible torments that she had made Piédelot suffer, for impotent vengeance is such intense pain!

Alas! we who knew how to avenge our comrade ought to have thought that this woman would know how to avenge her husband, and have been on our guard. It is true that one of us kept watch every night, and that at first we tied her by a long rope to the great oak bench that was fastened to the wall. But, by and by, as she had never tried to escape, in spite of her hatred for us, we relaxed our extreme prudence, and allowed her to sleep somewhere else except on the bench, and without being tied. What had we to fear? She was at the end of the room, a man was on guard at the door, and between her and the sentinel the captain's wife and two other men used to lie. She was alone and unarmed against four, so there could be no danger.

One night when we were asleep, and the captain was on guard, the lancer's wife was lying more

quietly in her corner than usual, and she had even smiled for the first time since she had been our prisoner during the evening. Suddenly, however, in the middle of the night, we were all awakened by a terrible cry. We got up, groping about, and at once stumbled over a furious couple who were rolling about and fighting on the ground. It was the captain and the lancer's wife. We threw ourselves on them, and separated them in a moment. She was shouting and laughing, and he seemed to have the death rattle. All this took place in the dark. Two of us held her, and when a light was struck a terrible sight met our eyes. The captain was lying on the floor in a pool of blood, with an enormous gash in his throat, and his sword bayonet, that had been taken from his rifle, was sticking in the red, gaping wound. A few minutes afterward he died, without having been able to utter a word.

His wife did not shed a tear. Her eyes were dry, her throat was contracted, and she looked at the lancer's wife steadfastly, and with a calm ferocity that inspired fear.

"This woman belongs to me," she said to us suddenly. "You swore to me not a week ago to let me kill her as I chose, if she killed my husband; and you must keep your oath. You must fasten her securely to the fireplace, upright against the back of it, and then you can go where you like, but far from here. I will take my revenge on her myself. Leave the captain's body, and we three, he, she and I, will remain here."

We obeyed, and went away. She promised to write to us to Geneva, as we were returning thither.

VI

Two days later I received the following letter, dated the day after we had left, that had been written at an inn on the high road:

"My Friend: I am writing to you, according to my promise. For the moment I am at the inn, where I have just handed my prisoner over to a Prussian officer.

"I must tell you, my friend, that this poor woman has left two children in Germany. She had followed her husband, whom she adored, as she did not wish him to be exposed to the risks of war by himself, and as her children were with their grandparents. I have learned all this since yesterday, and it has turned my ideas of vengeance into more humane feelings. At the very moment when I felt pleasure in insulting this woman, and in threatening her with the most fearful torments, in recalling Piédelot, who had been burned alive, and in threatening her with a similar death, she looked at me coldly, and said:

"'What have you got to reproach me with, Frenchwoman? You think that you will do right in avenging your husband's death, is not that so?'

"'Yes,' I replied.

"'Very well, then; in killing him, I did what you are going to do in burning me. I avenged my husband, for your husband killed him.'

"'Well,' I replied, 'as you approve of this vengeance, prepare to endure it.'

"'I do not fear it.'

"And in fact she did not seem to have lost courage. Her face was calm, and she looked at me without trembling, while I brought wood and dried leaves together, and feverishly threw on to them the powder from some cartridges, which was to make her funeral pile the more cruel.

"I hesitated in my thoughts of persecution for a moment. But the captain was there, pale and covered with blood, and he seemed to be looking at me with his large, glassy eyes, and I applied myself to my work again after kissing his pale lips. Suddenly, however, on raising my head, I saw that she was crying, and I felt rather surprised.

"'So you are frightened?' I said to her.

"'No, but when I saw you kiss your husband, I thought of mine, of all whom I love.'

"She continued to sob, but stopping suddenly, she said to me in broken words and in a low voice:

"'Have you any children?'

"A shiver ran over me, for I guessed that this poor woman had some. She asked me to look in a pocketbook which was in her bosom, and in it I saw two photographs of quite young children, a boy and a girl, with those kind, gentle, chubby faces that German children have. In it there were also two locks of light hair and a letter in a large, childish hand, and beginning with German words which meant: 'My dear little mother.'

"I could not restrain my tears, my dear friend, and so I untied her, and without venturing to look at the face of my poor dead husband, who was not to be avenged, I went with her as far as the inn. She is free; I have just left her, and she kissed me with tears. I am going upstairs to my husband;

come as soon as possible, my dear friend, to look for our two bodies."

I set off with all speed, and when I arrived there was a Prussian patrol at the cottage; and when I asked what it all meant, I was told that there was a captain of *francs-tireurs* and his wife inside, both dead. I gave their names; they saw that I knew them, and I begged to be allowed to arrange their funeral.

"Somebody has already undertaken it," was the reply. "Go in if you wish to, as you know them. You can settle about their funeral with their friend."

I went in. The captain and his wife were lying side by side on a bed, and were covered by a sheet. I raised it, and saw that the woman had inflicted a similar wound in her throat to that from which her husband had died.

At the side of the bed there sat, watching and weeping, the woman who had been mentioned to me as their best friend. It was the lancer's wife.

THE PRISONERS

THERE was not a sound in the forest save the indistinct, fluttering sound of the snow falling on the trees. It had been snowing since noon; a little fine snow, that covered the branches as with frozen moss, and spread a silvery covering over the dead leaves in the ditches, and covered the roads with a white, yielding carpet, and made still more intense the boundless silence of this ocean of trees.

Before the door of the forester's dwelling a young woman, her arms bare to the elbow, was chopping wood with a hatchet on a block of stone. She was tall, slender, strong—a true girl of the woods, daughter and wife of a forester.

A voice called from within the house:

"We are alone to-night, Berthine; you must come in. It is getting dark, and there may be Prussians or wolves about."

"I've just finished, mother," replied the young woman, splitting as she spoke an immense log of wood with strong, deft blows, which expanded her chest each time she raised her arms to strike. "Here I am; there's no need to be afraid; it's quite light still."

Then she gathered up her sticks and logs, piled them in the chimney corner, went back to close the great oaken shutters, and finally came in, drawing behind her the heavy bolts of the door.

Her mother, a wrinkled old woman whom age had rendered timid, was spinning by the fireside.

"I am uneasy," she said, "when your father's not here. Two women are not much good."

"Oh," said the younger woman, "I'd cheerfully kill a wolf or a Prussian if it came to that."

And she glanced at a heavy revolver hanging above the hearth.

Her husband had been called upon to serve in the army at the beginning of the Prussian invasion, and the two women had remained alone with the old father, a keeper named Nicolas Pichon, sometimes called Long-legs, who refused obstinately to leave his home and take refuge in the town.

This town was Rethel, an ancient stronghold built on a rock. Its inhabitants were patriotic, and had made up their minds to resist the invaders, to fortify their native place, and, if need be, to stand a siege as in the good old days. Twice already, under Henri IV and under Louis XIV, the people of Rethel had distinguished themselves by their heroic defence of their town. They would do as much now, by gad! or else be slaughtered within their own walls.

They had, therefore, bought cannon and rifles, organized a militia, and formed themselves into battalions and companies, and now spent their time drilling all day long in the square. All—bakers, grocers, butchers, lawyers, carpenters, booksellers, chemists—took their turn at military training at regular hours of the day, unler the auspices of Monsieur Lavigne, a former noncommissioned officer in the dragoons, now a draper, having married the

daughter and inherited the business of Monsieur Ravaudan, Senior.

He had taken the rank of commanding officer in Rethel, and, seeing that all the young men had gone off to the war, he had enlisted all the others who were in favor of resisting an attack. Fat men now invariably walked the streets at a rapid pace, to reduce their weight and improve their breathing, and weak men carried weights to strengthen their muscles.

And they awaited the Prussians. But the Prussians did not appear. They were not far off, however, for twice already their scouts had penetrated as far as the forest dwelling of Nicolas Pichon, called Long-legs.

The old keeper, who could run like a fox, had come and warned the town. The guns had been got ready, but the enemy had not shown themselves.

Long-legs' dwelling served as an outpost in the Aveline forest. Twice a week the old man went to the town for provisions and brought the citizens news of the outlying district.

On this particular day he had gone to announce the fact that a small detachment of German infantry had halted at his house the day before, about two o'clock in the afternoon, and had left again almost immediately. The noncommissioned officer in charge spoke French.

When the old man set out like this he took with him his dogs—two powerful animals with the jaws of lions—as a safeguard against the wolves, which were beginning to get fierce, and he left directions with the two women to barricade themselves securely within their dwelling as soon as night fell.

The younger feared nothing, but her mother was always apprehensive, and repeated continually:

"We'll come to grief one of these days. You see if we don't!"

This evening she was, if possible, more nervous than ever.

"Do you know what time your father will be back?" she asked.

"Oh, not before eleven, for certain. When he dines with the commandant he's always late."

And Berthine was hanging her pot over the fire to warm the soup when she suddenly stood still, listening attentively to a sound that had reached her through the chimney.

"There are people walking in the wood," she said; "seven or eight men at least."

The terrified old woman stopped her spinning wheel, and gasped:

"Oh, my God! And your father not here!"

She had scarcely finished speaking when a succession of violent blows shook the door.

As the woman made no reply, a loud, guttural voice shouted:

"Open the door!"

After a brief silence the same voice repeated:

"Open the door or I'll break it down!"

Berthine took the heavy revolver from its hook, slipped it into the pocket of her skirt, and, putting her ear to the door, asked:

"Who are you?"

"The detachment that came here the other day," replied the voice.

"What do you want?" demanded the young woman.

"My men and I have lost our way in the forest since morning. Open the door or I'll break it down!"

The forester's daughter had no choice; she shot back the heavy bolts, threw open the ponderous shutter, and perceived in the wan light of the snow six men, six Prussian soldiers, the same who had visited the house the day before.

"What are you doing here at this time of night?" she asked dauntlessly.

"I lost my bearings," replied the officer; "lost them completely. Then I recognized this house. I've eaten nothing since morning, nor my men either."

"But I'm quite alone with my mother this evening," said Berthine.

"Never mind," replied the soldier, who seemed a decent sort of fellow. "We won't do you any harm, but you must give us something to eat. We are nearly dead with hunger and fatigue."

Then the girl moved aside.

"Come in," she said.

Then entered, covered with snow, their helmets sprinkled with a creamy-looking froth, which gave them the appearance of meringues. They seemed utterly worn out.

The young woman pointed to the wooden benches on either side of the large table.

"Sit down," she said, "and I'll make you some soup. You certainly look tired out, and no mistake."

Then she bolted the door afresh.

She put more water in the pot, added butter and potatoes; then, taking down a piece of bacon from a hook in the chimney corner, cut it in two and slipped half of it into the pot.

The six men watched her movements with hungry eyes. They had placed their rifles and helmets in a corner and waited for supper, as well behaved as children on a school bench.

The old mother had resumed her spinning, casting from time to time a furtive and uneasy glance at the soldiers. Nothing was to be heard save the humming of the wheel, the crackling of the fire, and the singing of the water in the pot.

But suddenly a strange noise—a sound like the harsh breathing of some wild animal sniffing under the door—startled the occupants of the room.

The German officer sprang toward the rifles. Berthine stopped him with a gesture, and said, smilingly:

"It's only the wolves. They are like you—prowling hungry through the forest."

The incredulous man wanted to see with his own eyes, and as soon as the door was opened he perceived two large grayish animals disappearing with long, swinging trot into the darkness.

He returned to his seat, muttering:

"I wouldn't have believed it!"

And he waited quietly till supper was ready.

The men devoured their meal voraciously, with mouths stretched to their ears that they might swallow the more. Their round eyes opened at the same time as their jaws, and as the soup coursed down their throats it made a noise like the gurgling of water in a rainpipe.

The two women watched in silence the movements of the big red beards. The potatoes seemed to be engulfed in these moving fleeces.

But, as they were thirsty, the forester's daugh-

ter went down to the cellar to draw them some cider. She was gone some time. The cellar was small, with an arched ceiling, and had served, so people said, both as prison and as hiding-place during the Revolution. It was approached by means of a narrow, winding staircase, closed by a trap-door at the farther end of the kitchen.

When Berthine returned she was smiling mysteriously to herself. She gave the Germans her jug of cider.

Then she and her mother supped apart, at the other end of the kitchen.

The soldiers had finished eating, and were all six falling asleep as they sat round the table. Every now and then a forehead fell with a thud on the board, and the man, awakened suddenly, sat upright again.

Berthine said to the officer:

"Go and lie down, all of you, round the fire. There's lots of room for six. I'm going up to my room with my mother."

And the two women went upstairs. They could be heard locking the door and walking about overhead for a time; then they were silent.

The Prussians lay down on the floor, with their feet to the fire and their heads resting on their rolled-up cloaks. Soon all six snored loudly and uninterruptedly in six different keys.

They had been sleeping for some time when a shot rang out so loudly that it seemed directed against the very walls of the house. The soldiers rose hastily. Two—then three—more shots were fired.

The door opened hastily, and Berthine appeared,

barefooted and only half dressed, with her candle in her hand and a scared look on her face.

"There are the French," she stammered; "at least two hundred of them. If they find you here they'll burn the house down. For God's sake, hurry down into the cellar, and don't make a sound, whatever you do. If you make any noise we are lost."

"We'll go, we'll go," replied the terrified officer. "Which is the way?"

The young woman hurriedly raised the small, square trap-door, and the six men disappeared one after another down the narrow, winding staircase, feeling their way as they went.

But as soon as the spike of the last helmet was out of sight Berthine lowered the heavy oaken lid—thick as a wall, hard as steel, furnished with the hinges and bolts of a prison cell—shot the two heavy bolts, and began to laugh long and silently, possessed with a mad longing to dance above the heads of her prisoners.

They made no sound, inclosed in the cellar as in a strong-box, obtaining air only from a small, iron-barred vent-hole.

Berthine lighted her fire again, hung the pot over it, and prepared more soup, saying to herself:

"Father will be tired to-night."

Then she sat and waited. The heavy pendulum of the clock swung to and fro with a monotonous tick.

Every now and then the young woman cast an impatient glance at the dial—a glance which seemed to say:

"I wish he'd be quick!"

But soon there was a sound of voices beneath her

feet. Low, confused words reached her through the masonry which roofed the cellar. The Prussians were beginning to suspect the trick she had played them, and presently the officer came up the narrow staircase, and knocked at the trap-door.

"Open the door!" he cried.

"What do you want?" she said, rising from her seat and approaching the cellarway.

"Open the door!"

"I won't do any such thing!"

"Open it or I'll break it down!" shouted the man angrily.

She laughed.

"Hammer away, my good man! Hammer away!"

He struck with the butt-end of his gun at the closed oaken door. But it would have resisted a battering-ram.

The forester's daughter heard him go down the stairs again. Then the soldiers came one after another and tried their strength against the trap-door. But, finding their efforts useless, they all returned to the cellar and began to talk among themselves.

The young woman heard them for a short time, then she rose, opened the door of the house, looked out into the night, and listened.

A sound of distant barking reached her ear. She whistled just as a huntsman would, and almost immediately two great dogs emerged from the darkness, and bounded to her side. She held them tight, and shouted at the top of her voice:

"Hullo, father!"

A far-off voice replied:

"Hullo, Berthine!"

She waited a few seconds, then repeated:

"Hullo, father!"

The voice, nearer now, replied:

"Hullo, Berthine!"

"Don't go in front of the vent-hole!" shouted his daughter. "There are Prussians in the cellar!"

Suddenly the man's tall figure could be seen to the left, standing between two tree trunks.

"Prussians in the cellar?" he asked anxiously. "What are they doing?"

The young woman laughed.

"They are the same as were here yesterday. They lost their way, and I've given them free lodgings in the cellar."

She told the story of how she had alarmed them by firing the revolver, and had shut them up in the cellar.

The man, still serious, asked:

"But what am I to do with them at this time of night?"

"Go and fetch Monsieur Lavigne with his men," she replied. "He'll take them prisoners. He'll be delighted."

Her father smiled.

"So he will—delighted."

"Here's some soup for you," said his daughter. "Eat it quick, and then be off."

The old keeper sat down at the table, and began to eat his soup, having first filled two plates and put them on the floor for the dogs.

The Prussians, hearing voices, were silent.

Long-legs set off a quarter of an hour later, and Berthine, with her head between her hands, waited.

The prisoners began to make themselves heard

again. They shouted, called, and beat furiously with the butts of their muskets against the rigid trap-door of the cellar.

Then they fired shots through the vent-hole, hoping, no doubt, to be heard by any German detachment which chanced to be passing that way.

The forester's daughter did not stir, but the noise irritated and unnerved her. Blind anger rose in her heart against the prisoners; she would have been only too glad to kill them all, and so silence them.

Then, as her impatience grew, she watched the clock, counting the minutes as they passed.

Her father had been gone an hour and a half. He must have reached the town by now. She conjured up a vision of him telling the story to Monsieur Lavigne, who grew pale with emotion, and rang for his servant to bring him his arms and uniform. She fancied she could hear the drum as it sounded the call to arms. Frightened faces appeared at the windows. The citizen-soldiers emerged from their houses half dressed, out of breath, buckling on their belts, and hurrying to the commandant's house.

Then the troop of soldiers, with Long-legs at its head, set forth through the night and the snow toward the forest.

She looked at the clock. "They may be here in an hour."

A nervous impatience possessed her. The minutes seemed interminable. Would the time never come?

At last the clock marked the moment she had fixed on for their arrival.

And she opened the door to listen for their approach. She perceived a shadowy form creeping toward the house. She was afraid, and cried out. But it was her father.

"They have sent me," he said, "to see if there is any change in the state of affairs."

"No—none."

Then he gave a shrill whistle. Soon a dark mass loomed up under the trees; the advance guard, composed of ten men.

"Don't go in front of the vent-hole!" repeated Long-legs at intervals.

And the first arrivals pointed out the much-dreaded vent-hole to those who came after.

At last the main body of the troop arrived, in all two hundred men, each carrying two hundred cartridges.

Monsieur Lavigne, in a state of intense excitement, posted them in such a fashion as to surround the whole house, save for a large space left vacant in front of the little hole on a level with the ground, through which the cellar derived its supply of air.

Monsieur Lavigne struck the trap-door a blow with his foot, and called:

"I wish to speak to the Prussian officer!"

The German did not reply.

"The Prussian officer!" again shouted the commandant.

Still no response. For the space of twenty minutes Monsieur Lavigne called on this silent officer to surrender with bag and baggage, promising him that all lives should be spared, and that he and his men should be accorded military honors. But he

could extort no sign, either of consent or of defiance. The situation became a puzzling one.

The citizen-soldiers kicked their heels in the snow, slapping their arms across their chest, as cab-drivers do, to warm themselves, and gazing at the vent-hole with a growing and childish desire to pass in front of it.

At last one of them took the risk—a man named Potdevin, who was fleet of limb. He ran like a deer across the zone of danger. The experiment succeeded. The prisoners gave no sign of life.

A voice cried:

"There's no one there!"

And another soldier crossed the open space before the dangerous vent-hole. Then this hazardous sport developed into a game. Every minute a man ran swiftly from one side to the other, like a boy playing baseball, kicking up the snow behind him as he ran. They had lighted big fires of dead wood at which to warm themselves, and the figures of the runners were illumined by the flames as they passed rapidly from the camp on the right to that on the left.

Some one shouted:

"It's your turn now, Maloison."

Maloison was a fat baker, whose corpulent person served to point many a joke among his comrades.

He hesitated. They chaffed him. Then, nerving himself to the effort, he set off at a little, waddling gait, which shook his fat paunch and made the whole detachment laugh till they cried.

"Bravo, bravo, Maloison!" they shouted for his encouragement.

He had accomplished about two-thirds of his

journey when a long, crimson flame shot forth from the vent-hole. A loud report followed, and the fat baker fell face forward to the ground, uttering a frightful scream.

No one went to his assistance. Then he was seen to drag himself, groaning, on all-fours through the snow until he was beyond danger, when he fainted.

He was shot in the upper part of the thigh.

After the first surprise and fright were over they laughed at him again.

But Monsieur Lavigne appeared on the threshold of the forester's dwelling. He had formed his plan of attack. He called in a loud voice:

"I want Planchut, the plumber, and his workmen."

Three men approached.

"Take the eavestroughs from the roof."

In a quarter of an hour they brought the commandant thirty yards of pipes.

Next, with infinite precaution, he had a small round hole drilled in the trap-door; then, making a conduit with the troughs from the pump to this opening, he said, with an air of extreme satisfaction:

"Now we'll give these German gentlemen something to drink."

A shout of frenzied admiration, mingled with uproarious laughter, burst from his followers. And the commandant organized relays of men, who were to relieve one another every five minutes. Then he commanded:

"Pump!"

And, the pump handle having been set in motion,

a stream of water trickled throughout the length of the piping, and flowed from step to step down the cellar stairs with a gentle, gurgling sound.

They waited.

An hour passed, then two, then three.

The commandant, in a state of feverish agitation, walked up and down the kitchen, putting his ear to the ground every now and then to discover, if possible, what the enemy were doing and whether they would soon capitulate.

The enemy was astir now. They could be heard moving the casks about, talking, splashing through the water.

Then, about eight o'clock in the morning, a voice came from the vent-hole:

"I want to speak to the French officer."

Lavigne replied from the window, taking care not to put his head out too far:

"Do you surrender?"

"I surrender."

"Then put your rifles outside."

A rifle immediately protruded from the hole, and fell into the snow, then another and another, until all were disposed of. And the voice which had spoken before said:

"I have no more. Be quick! I am drowned."

"Stop pumping!" ordered the commandant.

And the pump handle hung motionless.

Then, having filled the kitchen with armed and waiting soldiers, he slowly raised the oaken trap-door.

Four heads appeared, soaking wet, four fair heads with long, sandy hair, and one after another the six

Germans emerged—scared, shivering and dripping from head to foot.

They were seized and bound. Then, as the French feared a surprise, they set off at once in two convoys, one in charge of the prisoners, and the other conducting Maloison on a mattress borne on poles.

They made a triumphal entry into Rethel.

Monsieur Lavigne was decorated as a reward for having captured a Prussian advance guard, and the fat baker received the military medal for wounds received at the hands of the enemy.

SIMON'S PAPA

NOON had just struck. The school door opened and the youngsters darted out, jostling each other in their haste to get out quickly. But instead of promptly dispersing and going home to dinner as usual, they stopped a few paces off, broke up into knots, and began whispering.

The fact was that, that morning, Simon, the son of La Blanchotte, had, for the first time, attended school.

They had all of them in their families heard talk of La Blanchotte; and, although in public she was welcome enough, the mothers among themselves treated her with a somewhat disdainful compassion, which the children had imitated without in the least knowing why.

As for Simon himself, they did not know him, for he never went out, and did not run about with them in the streets of the village, or along the banks of the river. And they did not care for him; so it was with a certain delight, mingled with considerable astonishment, that they met and repeated to each other what had been said by a lad of fourteen or fifteen who appeared to know all about it, so sagaciously did he wink. "You know—Simon—well, he has no papa."

Just then La Blanchotte's son appeared in the doorway of the school.

SIMON'S PAPA

He was seven or eight years old, rather pale, very neat, with a timid and almost awkward manner.

He was starting home to his mother's house when the groups of his schoolmates, whispering and watching him with the mischievous and heartless eyes of children bent upon playing a nasty trick, gradually closed in around him and ended by surrounding him altogether. There he stood in their midst, surprised and embarrassed, not understanding what they were going to do with him. But the lad who had brought the news, puffed up with the success he had met with already, demanded:

"What is your name, you?"

He answered: "Simon."

"Simon what?" retorted the other.

The child, altogether bewildered, repeated: "Simon."

The lad shouted at him: "One is named Simon something—that is not a name—Simon indeed."

The child, on the brink of tears, replied for the third time:

"My name is Simon."

The urchins began to laugh. The triumphant tormentor cried: "You can see plainly that he has no papa."

A deep silence ensued. The children were dumfounded by this extraordinary, impossible, monstrous thing—a boy who had not a papa; they looked upon him as a phenomenon, an unnatural being, and they felt that hitherto inexplicable contempt of their mothers for La Blanchotte growing upon them. As for Simon, he had leaned against a tree to avoid falling, and he remained as if prostrated by an irreparable disaster. He sought to explain, but could

think of nothing to say to refute this horrible charge that he had no papa. At last he shouted at them quite recklessly: "Yes, I have one."

"Where is he?" demanded the boy.

Simon was silent, he did not know. The children roared, tremendously excited; and those country boys, little more than aimals, experienced that cruel craving which prompts the fowls of a farmyard to destroy one of their number as soon as it is wounded. Simon suddenly espied a little neighbor, the son of a widow, whom he had seen, as he himself was to be seen, always alone with his mother.

"And no more have you," he said; "no more have you a papa."

"Yes," replied the other, "I have one."

"Where is he?" rejoined Simon.

"He is dead," declared the brat, with superb dignity; "he is in the cemetery, is my papa."

A murmur of approval rose among the little wretches as if this fact of possessing a papa dead in a cemetery had caused their comrade to grow big enough to crush the other one who had no papa at all. And these boys, whose fathers were for the most part bad men, drunkards, thieves, and who beat their wives, jostled each other to press closer and closer, as though they, the legitimate ones, would smother by their pressure one who was illegitimate.

The boy who chanced to be next Simon suddenly put his tongue out at him with a mocking air and shouted at him:

"No papa! No papa!"

Simon seized him by the hair with both hands and set to work to disable his legs with kicks, while he

bit his cheek ferociously. A tremendous struggle ensued between the two combatants, and Simon found himself beaten, torn, bruised, rolled on the ground in the midst of the ring of applauding schoolboys. As he arose, mechanically brushing with his hand his little blouse all covered with dust, some one shouted at him:

"Go and tell your papa."

Then he felt a great sinking at his heart. They were stronger than he was, they had beaten him, and he had no answer to give them, for he knew well that it was true that he had no papa. Full of pride, he attempted for some moments to struggle against the tears which were choking him. He had a feeling of suffocation, and then without any sound he commenced to weep, with great shaking sobs. A ferocious joy broke out among his enemies, and, with one accord, just like savages in their fearful festivals, they took each other by the hand and danced round him in a circle, repeating as a refrain:

"No papa! No papa!"

But suddenly Simon ceased sobbing. He became ferocious. There were stones under his feet; he picked them up and with all his strength hurled them at his tormentors. Two or three were struck and rushed off yelling, and so formidable did he appear that the rest became panic-stricken. Cowards, as the mob always is in presence of an exasperated man, they broke up and fled. Left alone, the little fellow without a father set off running toward the fields, for a recollection had been awakened in him which determined his soul to a great resolve. He made up his mind to drown himself in the river.

He remembered, in fact, that eight days before, a poor devil who begged for his livelihood had thrown himself into the water because he had no more money. Simon had been there when they fished him out again; and the wretched man, who usually seemed to him so miserable, and ugly, had then struck him as being so peaceful with his pale cheeks, his long drenched beard, and his open eyes full of calm. The bystanders had said:

"He is dead."

And some one had said:

"He is quite happy now."

And Simon wished to drown himself also, because he had no father, just like the wretched being who had no money.

He reached the water and watched it flowing. Some fish were sporting briskly in the clear stream and occasionally made a little bound and caught the flies flying on the surface. He stopped crying in order to watch them, for their maneuvers interested him greatly. But, at intervals, as in a tempest intervals of calm alternate suddenly with tremendous gusts of wind, which snap off the trees and then lose themselves in the horizon, this thought would return to him with intense pain:

"I am going to drown myself because I have no papa."

It was very warm, fine weather. The pleasant sunshine warmed the grass. The water shone like a mirror. And Simon enjoyed some minutes of happiness, of that languor which follows weeping, and felt inclined to fall asleep there upon the grass in the warm sunshine.

A little green frog leaped from under his feet. He

endeavored to catch it. It escaped him. He followed it and lost it three times in succession. At last he caught it by one of its hind legs and began to laugh as he saw the efforts the creature made to escape. It gathered itself up on its hind legs and then with a violent spring suddenly stretched them out as stiff as two bars; while it beat the air with its front legs as though they were hands, its round eyes staring in their circle of yellow. It reminded him of a toy made of straight slips of wood nailed zigzag one on the other, which by a similar movement regulated the movements of the little soldiers fastened thereon. Then he thought of his home, and then of his mother, and, overcome by sorrow, he again began to weep. A shiver passed over him. He knelt down and said his prayers as before going to bed. But he was unable to finish them, for tumultuous, violent sobs shook his whole frame. He no longer thought, he no longer saw anything around him, and was wholly absorbed in crying.

Suddenly a heavy hand was placed upon his shoulder, and a rough voice asked him:

"What is it that causes you so much grief, my little man?"

Simon turned round. A tall workman with a beard and black curly hair was staring at him good-naturedly. He answered with his eyes and throat full of tears:

"They beat me—because—I—I have no—papa—no papa."

"What!" said the man, smiling; "why, everybody has one."

The child answered painfully amid his spasms of grief:

"But I—I—I have none."

Then the workman became serious. He had recognized La Blanchotte's son, and, although himself a new arrival in the neighborhood, he had a vague idea of her history.

"Well," said he, "console yourself, my boy, and come with me home to your mother. They will give you—a papa."

And so they started on the way, the big fellow holding the little fellow by the hand, and the man smiled, for he was not sorry to see this Blanchotte, who was, it was said, one of the prettiest girls of the countryside, and, perhaps, he was saying to himself, at the bottom of his heart, that a lass who had erred might very well err again.

They arrived in front of a very neat little white house.

"There it is," exclaimed the child, and he cried, "Mamma!"

A woman appeared, and the workman instantly left off smiling, for he saw at once that there was no fooling to be done with the tall pale girl who stood austerely at her door as though to defend from one man the threshold of that house where she had already been betrayed by another. Intimidated, his cap in his hand, he stammered out:

"See, madame, I have brought you back your little boy who had lost himself near the river."

But Simon flung his arms about his mother's neck and told her, as he again began to cry:

"No, mamma, I wished to drown myself, because the others had beaten me—had beaten me—because I have no papa."

A burning redness covered the young woman's

cheeks; and, hurt to the quick, she embraced her child passionately, while the tears coursed down her face. The man, much moved, stood there, not knowing how to get away. But Simon suddenly ran to him and said:

"Will you be my papa?"

A deep silence ensued. La Blanchotte, dumb and tortured with shame, leaned herself against the wall, both her hands upon her heart. The child, seeing that no answer was made him, replied:

"If you will not, I shall go back and drown myself."

The workman took the matter as a jest and answered, laughing:

"Why, yes, certainly I will."

"What is your name," went on the child, "so that I may tell the others when they wish to know your name?"

"Philip," answered the man.

Simon was silent a moment so that he might get the name well into his head; then he stretched out his arms, quite consoled, as he said:

"Well, then, Philip, you are my papa."

The workman, lifting him from the ground, kissed him hastily on both cheeks, and then walked away very quickly with great strides.

When the child returned to school next day he was received with a spiteful laugh, and at the end of school, when the lads were on the point of recommencing, Simon threw these words at their heads as he would have done a stone: "He is named Philip, my papa."

Yells of delight burst out from all sides.

"Philip who? Philip what? What on earth is Philip? Where did you pick up your Philip?"

Simon answered nothing; and, immovable in his faith, he defied them with his eye, ready to be martyred rather than fly before them. The school master came to his rescue and he returned home to his mother.

During three months, the tall workman, Philip, frequently passed by La Blanchotte's house, and sometimes he made bold to speak to her when he saw her sewing near the window. She answered him civilly, always sedately, never joking with him, nor permitting him to enter her house. Notwithstanding, being, like all men, a bit of a coxcomb, he imagined that she was often rosier than usual when she chatted with him.

But a lost reputation is so difficult to regain and always remains so fragile that, in spite of the shy reserve of La Blanchotte, they already gossiped in the neighborhood.

As for Simon, he loved his new papa very much, and walked with him nearly every evening when the day's work was done. He went regularly to school, and mixed with great dignity with his schoolfellows without ever answering them back.

One day, however, the lad who had first attacked him said to him:

"You have lied. You have not a papa named Philip."

"Why do you say that?" demanded Simon, much disturbed.

The youth rubbed his hands. He replied:

"Because if you had one he would be your mamma's husband."

Simon was confused by the truth of this reasoning; nevertheless, he retorted:

"He is my papa, all the same."

"That can very well be," exclaimed the urchin with a sneer, "but that is not being your papa altogether."

La Blanchotte's little one bowed his head and went off dreaming in the direction of the forge belonging to old Loizon, where Philip worked.

This forge was as though buried beneath trees. It was very dark there; the red glare of a formidable furnace alone lit up with great flashes five blacksmiths, who hammered upon their anvils with a terrible din. They were standing enveloped in flame, like demons, their eyes fixed on the red-hot iron they were pounding; and their dull ideas rose and fell with their hammers.

Simon entered without being noticed, and went quietly to pluck his friend by the sleeve. The latter turned round. All at once the work came to a standstill, and all the men looked on, very attentive. Then, in the midst of this unaccustomed silence, rose the slender pipe of Simon:

"Say, Philip, the Michaude boy told me just now that you were not altogether my papa."

"Why not?" asked the blacksmith.

The child replied with all innocence:

"Because you are not my mamma's husband."

No one laughed. Philip remained standing, leaning his forehead upon the back of his great hands, which supported the handle of his hammer standing upright upon the anvil. He mused. His four companions watched him, and Simon, a tiny mite among these giants, anxiously waited. Suddenly, one of

the smiths, answering to the sentiment of all, said to Philip:

"La Blanchotte is a good, honest girl, and upright and steady in spite of her misfortune, and would make a worthy wife for an honest man."

"That is true," remarked the three others.

The smith continued:

"Is it the girl's fault if she went wrong? She had been promised marriage; and I know more than one who is much respected to-day, and who sinned every bit as much."

"That is true," responded the three men in chorus.

He resumed:

"How hard she has toiled, poor thing, to bring up her child all alone, and how she has wept all these years she has never gone out except to church, God only knows."

"This is also true," said the others.

Then nothing was heard but the bellows which fanned the fire of the furnace. Philip hastily bent himself down to Simon:

"Go and tell your mother that I am coming to speak to her this evening."

Then he pushed the child out by the shoulders. He returned to his work, and with a single blow the five hammers again fell upon their anvils. Thus they wrought the iron until nightfall, strong, powerful, happy, like contented hammers. But just as the great bell of a cathedral resounds upon feast days above the jingling of the other bells, so Philip's hammer, sounding above the rest, clanged second after second with a deafening uproar. And he stood amid the flying sparks plying his trade vigorously.

The sky was full of stars as he knocked at La

Blanchotte's door. He had on his Sunday blouse, a clean shirt, and his beard was trimmed. The young woman showed herself upon the threshold, and said in a grieved tone:

"It is ill to come thus when night has fallen, Mr. Philip."

He wished to answer, but stammered and stood confused before her.

She resumed:

"You understand, do you not, that it will not do for me to be talked about again."

"What does that matter to me, if you will be my wife!"

No voice replied to him, but he believed that he heard in the shadow of the room the sound of a falling body. He entered quickly; and Simon, who had gone to bed, distinguished the sound of a kiss and some words that his mother murmured softly. Then, all at once, he found himself lifted up by the hands of his friend, who, holding him at the length of his herculean arms, exclaimed:

"You will tell them, your schoolmates, that your papa is Philip Remy, the blacksmith, and that he will pull the ears of all who do you any harm."

On the morrow, when the school was full and lessons were about to begin, little Simon stood up, quite pale with trembling lips:

"My papa," said he in a clear voice, "is Philip Remy, the blacksmith, and he has promised to pull the ears of all who does me any harm."

This time no one laughed, for he was very well known, was Philip Remy, the blacksmith, and was a papa of whom any one in the world would have been proud.

TOINE

HE was known for thirty miles round was father Toine—fat Toine, Toine-my-extra, Antoine Mâcheblé, nicknamed Burnt-Brandy —the innkeeper of Tournevent.

It was he who had made famous this hamlet buried in a niche in the valley that led down to the sea, a poor little peasants' hamlet consisting of ten Norman cottages surrounded by ditches and trees.

The houses were hidden behind a curve which had given the place the name of Tournevent. It seemed to have sought shelter in this ravine overgrown with grass and rushes, from the keen, salt sea wind—the ocean wind that devours and burns like fire, that drys up and withers like the sharpest frost of winter, just as birds seek shelter in the furrows of the fields in time of storm.

But the whole hamlet seemed to be the property of Antoine Mâcheblé, nicknamed Burnt-Brandy, who was called also Toine, or Toine-My-Extra-Special, the latter in consequence of a phrase current in his mouth:

"My Extra-Special is the best in France."

His "Extra-Special" was, of course, his cognac.

For the last twenty years he had served the whole countryside with his Extra-Special and his "Burnt-

Brandy," for whenever he was asked: "What shall I drink, Toine?" he invariably answered: "A burnt-brandy, my son-in-law; that warms the inside and clears the head—there's nothing better for your body."

He called everyone his son-in-law, though he had no daughter, either married or to be married.

Well known indeed was Toine Burnt-Brandy, the stoutest man in all Normandy. His little house seemed ridiculously small, far too small and too low to hold him; and when people saw him standing at his door, as he did all day long, they asked one another how he could possibly get through the door. But he went in whenever a customer appeared, for it was only right that Toine should be invited to take his thimbleful of whatever was drunk in his wine shop.

His inn bore the sign: "The Friends' Meeting-Place"—and old Toine was, indeed, the friend of all. His customers came from Fécamp and Montvilliers, just for the fun of seeing him and hearing him talk; for fat Toine would have made a tombstone laugh. He had a way of chaffing people without offending them, or of winking to express what he didn't say, of slapping his thighs when he was merry in such a way as to make you hold your sides, laughing. And then, merely to see him drink was a curiosity. He drank everything that was offered him, his roguish eyes twinkling, both with the enjoyment of drinking and at the thought of the money he was taking in. His was a double pleasure: first, that of drinking; and second, that of piling up the cash.

You should have heard him quarrelling with his

wife! It was worth paying for to see them together. They had wrangled all the thirty years they had been married; but Toine was good-humored, while his better-half grew angry. She was a tall peasant woman, who walked with long steps like a stork, and had a head resembling that of an angry screech-owl. She spent her time rearing chickens in a little poultry-yard behind the inn, and she was noted for her success in fattening them for the table.

Whenever the gentry of Fécamp gave a dinner they always had at least one of Madame Toine's chickens to be in the fashion.

But she was born ill-tempered, and she went through life in a mood of perpetual discontent. Annoyed at everyone, she seemed to be particularly annoyed at her husband. She disliked his gaiety, his reputation, his rude health, his embonpoint. She treated him as a good-for-nothing creature because he earned his money without working, and as a glutton because he ate and drank as much as ten ordinary men; and not a day went by without her declaring spitefully:

"You'd be better in the stye along with the pigs! You're so fat it makes me sick to look at you!"

And she would shout in his face:

"Wait! Wait a bit! We'll see! You'll burst one of these fine days like a sack of corn—you old bloat, you!"

Toine would laugh heartily, patting his corpulent person, and replying:

"Well, well, old hen, why don't you fatten up your chickens like that? Just try!"

And, rolling his sleeves back from his enormous arm, he said:

"That would make a fine wing now, wouldn't it?"

And the customers, doubled up with laughter, would thump the table with their fists and stamp their feet on the floor.

The old woman, mad with rage, would repeat:

"Wait a bit! Wait a bit! You'll see what'll happen. He'll burst like a sack of grain!"

And off she would go, amid the jeers and laughter of the drinkers.

Toine was, in fact, an astonishing sight, he was so fat, so heavy, so red. He was one of those enormous beings with whom Death seems to be amusing himself—playing perfidious tricks and pranks, investing with an irresistibly comic air his slow work of destruction. Instead of manifesting his approach, as with others, in white hairs, in emaciation, in wrinkles, in the gradual collapse which makes the onlookers say: "Gad! how he has changed!" he took a malicious pleasure in fattening Toine, in making him monstrous and absurd, in tingeing his face with a deep crimson, in giving him the appearance of superhuman health, and the changes he inflicts on all were in the case of Toine laughable, comic, amusing, instead of being painful and distressing to witness.

"Wait a bit! Wait a bit!" said his wife. "You'll see."

At last Toine had an apoplectic fit, and was paralyzed in consequence. The giant was put to bed in the little room behind the partition of the drinking-room that he might hear what was said and talk to

his friends, for his head was quite clear although his enormous body was helplessly inert. It was hoped at first that his immense legs would regain some degree of power; but this hope soon disappeared, and Toine spent his days and nights in the bed, which was only made up once a week, with the help of four neighbors, who lifted the innkeeper, each holding a limb, while his mattress was turned.

He kept his spirits, nevertheless; but his gaiety was of a different kind—more timid, more humble; and he lived in a constant, childlike fear of his wife, who grumbled from morning till night:

"Look at him there—the great glutton! the good-for-nothing creature, the old boozer! Serve him right, serve him right!"

He no longer answered her. He contented himself with winking behind the old woman's back, and turning over on his other side—the only movement of which he was now capable. He called this exercise a "tack to the north" or a "tack to the south."

His great distraction nowadays was to listen to the conversations in the bar, and to shout through the wall when he recognized a friend's voice:

"Hallo, my son-in-law! Is that you, Célestin?"

And Célestin Maloisel answered:

"Yes, it's me, Toine. Are you getting about again yet, old fellow?"

"Not exactly getting about," answered Toine. "But I haven't grown thin; my carcass is still good."

Soon he got into the way of asking his intimates into his room to keep him company, although it grieved him to see that they had to drink without him. It pained him to the quick that his customers should be drinking without him.

"That's what hurts worst of all," he would say —"that I cannot drink my Extra-Special any more. I can put up with everything else, but going without drink is the very deuce."

Then his wife's screech-owl face would appear at the window, and she would break in with the words:

"Look at him! Look at him now, the good-for-nothing wretch! I've got to feed him and wash him just as if he were a pig!"

And when the old woman had gone, a cock with red feathers would sometimes fly up to the window sill and looking into the room with his round inquisitive eye, would begin to crow loudly. Occasionally, too, a few hens would flutter as far as the foot of the bed, seeking crumbs on the floor. Toine's friends soon deserted the drinking room to come and chat every afternoon beside the invalid's bed. Helpless though he was, the jovial Toine still provided them with amusement. He would have made the devil himself laugh. Three men were regular in their attendance at the bedside: Célestin Maloisel, a tall, thin fellow, somewhat gnarled, like the trunk of an apple-tree; Prosper Horslaville, a withered little man with a ferret nose, cunning as a fox; and Césaire Paumelle, who never spoke, but who enjoyed Toine's society all the same.

They brought a plank from the yard, propped it upon the edge of the bed, and played dominoes from two till six.

But Toine's wife soon became insufferable. She could not endure that her fat, lazy husband should amuse himself at games while lying in his bed; and whenever she caught him beginning a game she pounced furiously on the dominoes, overturned the

plank, and carried all away into the bar, declaring that it was quite enough to have to feed that fat, lazy pig without seeing him amusing himself, as if to annoy poor people who had to work hard all day long.

Célestin Maloisel and Césaire Paumelle bent their heads to the storm, but Prosper Horslaville egged on the old woman, and was only amused at her wrath.

One day, when she was more angry than usual, he said:

"Do you know what I'd do if I were you?"

She fixed her owl's eyes on him, and waited for his next words.

Prosper went on:

"Your man is as hot as an oven, and he never leaves his bed—well, I'd make him hatch some eggs."

She was struck dumb at the suggestion, thinking that Prosper could not possibly be in earnest. But he continued:

"I'd put five under one arm, and five under the other, the same day that I set a hen. They'd all come out at the same time; then I'd take your husband's chickens to the hen to bring up with her own. You'd rear a fine lot that way."

"Could it be done?" asked the astonished old woman.

"Could it be done?" echoed the man. "Why not? Since eggs can be hatched in a warm box why shouldn't they be hatched in a warm bed?"

She was struck by this reasoning, and went away soothed and reflective.

A week later she entered Toine's room with her apron full of eggs, and said:

"I've just put the yellow hen on ten eggs. Here are ten for you; try not to break them."

"What do you want?" asked the amazed Toine.

"I want you to hatch them, you lazy creature!" she answered.

He laughed at first; then, finding she was serious, he got angry, and refused absolutely to have the eggs put under his great arms, that the warmth of his body might hatch them.

But the old woman declared wrathfully:

"You'll get no dinner as long as you won't have them. You'll see what'll happen."

Toine was uneasy, but answered nothing.

When twelve o'clock struck, he called out:

"Hullo, mother, is the soup ready?"

"There's no soup for you, lazy-bones," cried the old woman from her kitchen.

He thought she must be joking, and waited a while. Then he begged, implored, swore, "tacked to the north" and "tacked to the south," and beat on the wall with his fists, but had to consent at last to five eggs being placed against his left side; after which he had his soup.

When his friends arrived that afternoon they thought he must be ill, he seemed so constrained and queer.

They started the daily game of dominoes. But Toine appeared to take no pleasure in it, and reached forth his hand very slowly, and with great precaution.

"What's wrong with your arm?" asked Horslaville.

"I have a sort of stiffness in the shoulder," answered Toine.

Suddenly they heard people come into the inn. The players were silent.

It was the mayor with the deputy. They ordered two glasses of Extra-Special, and began to discuss local affairs. As they were talking in somewhat low tones Toine wanted to put his ear to the wall, and, forgetting all about his eggs, he made a sudden "tack to the north," which had the effect of plunging him into the midst of an omelette.

At the loud oath he swore his wife came hurrying into the room, and, guessing what had happened, stripped the bedclothes from him with lightning rapidity. She stood at first without moving or uttering a syllable, speechless with indignation at sight of the yellow poultice sticking to her husband's side.

Then, trembling with fury, she threw herself on the paralytic, showering on him blows such as those with which she cleaned her linen on the seashore. Toine's three friends were choking with laughter, coughing, spluttering and shouting, and the fat innkeeper himself warded his wife's attacks with all the prudence of which he was capable, that he might not also break the five eggs at his other side.

Toine was conquered. He had to hatch eggs, he had to give up his games of dominoes and renounce movement of any sort, for the old woman angrily deprived him of food whenever he broke an egg.

He lay on his back, with eyes fixed on the ceiling, motionless, his arms raised like wings, warming against his body the rudimentary chickens enclosed in their white shells.

He spoke now only in hushed tones, as if he

feared a noise as much as motion, and he took a feverish interest in the yellow hen who was accomplishing in the poultry-yard the same task as he.

"Has the yellow hen eaten her food all right?" he would ask his wife.

And the old woman went from her fowls to her husband, and from her husband to her fowls, devoured by anxiety as to the welfare of the little chickens who were maturing in the bed and in the nest.

The country people who knew the story came, agog with curiosity, to ask news of Toine. They entered his room on tiptoe, as one enters a sick-chamber, and asked:

"Well! how goes it?"

"All right," said Toine; "only it keeps me fearfully hot."

One morning his wife entered in a state of great excitement, and declared:

"The yellow hen has seven chickens! Three of the eggs were addled."

Toine's heart beat painfully. How many would he have?

"Will it soon be over?" he asked, with the anguish of a woman who is about to become a mother.

"It's to be hoped so!" answered the old woman crossly, haunted by fear of failure.

They waited. Friends of Toine who had got wind that his time was drawing near arrived, and filled the little room.

Nothing else was talked about in the neighboring cottages. Inquirers asked one another for news as they stood at their doors.

About three o'clock Toine fell asleep. He slumbered half his time nowadays. He was suddenly awakened by an unaccustomed tickling under his right arm. He put his left hand on the spot, and seized a little creature covered with yellow down, which fluttered in his hand.

His emotion was so great that he cried out, and let go his hold of the chicken, which ran over his chest. The bar was full of people at the time. The customers rushed to Toine's room, and made a circle round him as they would round a travelling showman; while Madame Toine picked up the chicken, which had taken refuge under her husband's beard.

No one spoke, so great was the tension. It was a warm April day. Outside the window the yellow hen could be heard calling to her newly-fledged brood.

Toine, who was perspiring with emotion and anxiety, murmured:

"I have another now—under the left arm."

His wife plunged her great bony hand into the bed, and pulled out a second chicken with all the care of a midwife.

The neighbors wanted to see it. It was passed from one to another, and examined as if it were a phenomenon.

For twenty minutes no more hatched out, then four emerged at the same moment from their shells.

There was a great commotion among the lookers-on. And Toine smiled with satisfaction, beginning to take pride in this unusual sort of paternity. There were not many like him! Truly, he was a remarkable specimen of humanity!

"That makes six!" he declared. "Great heavens, what a christening we'll have!"

And a loud laugh rose from all present. Newcomers filled the bar. They asked one another:

"How many are there?"

"Six."

Toine's wife took this new family to the hen, who clucked loudly, bristled her feathers, and spread her wings wide to shelter her growing brood of little ones.

"There's one more!" cried Toine.

He was mistaken. There were three! It was an unalloyed triumph! The last chicken broke through its shell at seven o'clock in the evening. All the eggs were good! And Toine, beside himself with joy, his brood hatched out, exultant, kissed the tiny creature on the back, almost suffocating it. He wanted to keep it in his bed until morning, moved by a mother's tenderness toward the tiny being which he had brought to life, but the old woman carried it away like the others, turning a deaf ear to her husband's entreaties.

The delighted spectators went off to spread the news of the event, and Horslaville, who was the last to go, asked:

"You'll invite me when the first is cooked, won't you, Toine?"

At this idea a smile overspread the fat man's face, and he answered:

"Certainly I'll invite you, my son-in-law."

MADNESS

WHEN some one said to me, "Did you hear that Jacques Parent died in an insane asylum?" a shiver of fear and anguish chilled me to the marrow, and I suddenly seemed to see this strange fellow, who, perhaps, had been mad for a long time, even a frightful maniac.

He was a man of about forty, tall, thin, a little bent, with shining black eyes, so black that one could not see the pupils—shifty, sickly, restless, haunted eyes. What a singular, disquieting creature he was, bringing with him and spreading around him an atmosphere of vague uneasiness of mind and body, an incomprehensible nervousness, which makes one believe in supernatural influences!

He had an annoying habit: that of hiding his hands. He hardly ever displayed them as we do in touching objects or on a table. He never handled things with the familiar, lingering touch that almost all men have. He never left these long, bony, slender hands uncovered. He would shove them in his pockets or hide them by crossing his arms. One might think that he was afraid that they would do something forbidden in spite of him, some shameful or ridiculous action, if he left them free and master of their movements. When he had to use them for all the ordinary actions of life, he did it by quick jerks, as if he did not wish to leave them time to

act of their own accord, to brave his will, to do something else. At the table he would seize his glass, his knife or his fork so quickly that one never had time to foresee what he was going to do before the act was accomplished.

One evening I had an explanation of the strange malady of his soul. From time to time he would spend a few days with me in the country, and on that particular evening he seemed especially excited. A storm was brewing in the sky, which was heavy and black after a day of frightful heat. No breath of air stirred the leaves. A breeze like the breath of a furnace was passing over our faces and making us gasp. I felt ill at ease, excited, and I wished to go to bed.

When he saw me rising to leave, Jacques Parent seized my arm with a wild gesture, exclaiming: "Oh! no, stay a little longer!"

I looked at him with surprise, murmuring: "You see, the storm has unsettled my nerves!"

He moaned or rather shrieked: "And how about me? Oh, please stay! I can't remain here alone!"

He looked wild. I exclaimed: "What is the matter with you? Are you going mad?" And he muttered: "Yes, at times, on evenings like this, when electricity is in the air—I—I—I am afraid—I am afraid of myself—do you understand? I am gifted with a—a—a power—I don't know exactly what to call it or what it is, but I have within me such magnetic and extraordinary action that I am afraid—yes, at times I am afraid of myself, as I remarked a while ago."

Shaking wildly, he hid his trembling hands under his jacket. And I suddenly felt myself also shiver-

ing with a strange, powerful, vague fear. I longed to leave, to run away, never to see him again, never to see his shifty glance pass over me and then abruptly turn toward the ceiling and look for some dark corner to settle on, as if he also wished to hide his terrifying glance. I stammered: "You never told me that!"

He continued: "Do I ever mention it to anybody? But this evening I *must* talk. And you might as well know everything; perhaps you could assist me.

"Magnetism! Do you know what it is? No. Nobody knows, but it exists nevertheless. It is recognized; physicians themselves practice it; one of the most illustrious, Monsieur Charcot, makes use of it. Therefore there is no doubt; it exists.

"A man, a being has the frightful and incomprehensible power of putting another being to sleep by the power of his will, and, while he is asleep, of robbing him of his thoughts, just as one would rob a purse. He robs his thoughts—that is to say, his soul, his sanctuary, the secret of the ego, that impenetrable secret of man, that fountain of inexpressible ideas. He can rob him of everything he hides, of everything he loves. He opens this sanctuary, violates it, displays it, gives it to the public! Is this not atrocious, criminal, infamous?

"Why? How does this happen? Who knows?

"All is mystery. We can only interpret these things with our poor, incomplete, crippled senses, which are so feeble that they scarcely have the power of observing what surrounds us. Everything is mystery. Think of music, the divine art which upsets, carries away, intoxicates, maddens the mind, what is it? Nothing.

"You do not understand me? Listen. Two bodies come together. The air vibrates. These vibrations are more or less numerous, more or less rapid, strong, according to the nature of the shock. In our ear we have a little piece of skin which receives these vibrations from the air and transmits them to the brain in the form of a sound. Imagine a glass of water changing into wine in your mouth. The ear-drum accomplishes this wonderful metamorphosis, this surprising miracle of changing motion into sound. There!

"Music, that complex and mysterious art, as precise as algebra and as vague as a dream, made up of mathematics and of wind, the whole art arises from the peculiar function of this little piece of skin. If this little skin did not exist, sound would not exist either, since in itself it is nothing but a vibration. Could you imagine music without ears? No. Well, we are surrounded by things of the existence of which we shall always remain ignorant because the organs are lacking that would reveal them to us.

"Perhaps magnetism is one of these. We can just barely perceive this power, tremble at this proximity of spirits, get a peep at this new secret of nature, because we have not within us the revealing instrument.

"As for me—I am gifted with a frightful power. There seems to be another being shut up within me, who constantly wishes to escape, to do things in spite of me, who worries me, wears on me, exhausts me. What is it? I do not know, but there are two of us within my poor body, and it is often he, the other one, who is the stronger, just as this evening.

"I have only to look at people to put them to sleep, just as if I were to give them opium. I have only to stretch out my hand to do terrible things. If you only knew! yes, if you only knew! My power is not limited to men alone, but it also extends over the animals and even over objects.

"This tortures and terrifies me. I often feel a mad desire to tear out my eyes and cut off my hands.

"But I want—I want you to know everything. Here! I will show it to you—not on a human being, that is done everywhere, but on—on—a beast. Call Mirza."

He was walking rapidly like a wild animal, and he drew his hands from their hiding place. They seemed to terrify me, as though he had bared two swords.

I obeyed him mechanically, trembling with terror and devoured by an impetuous desire to see. I opened the door and whistled for my dog, which was sleeping in the vestibule. I immediately heard her running up the stairs, and she appeared, joyously wagging her tail. Then I ordered her to lie down on an armchair. She jumped up and Jacques began to look at her and pet her.

At first she seemed nervous; she trembled and turned her head in order to avoid the fixed stare of the man, seeming moved by a growing fear. Suddenly she began to shiver. Her whole body was shaking and she wished to escape. But he put his hand on the animal's head, and she immediately began to howl.

I myself felt numb, dizzy, just as one feels on a boat. The furniture seemed to lean and the walls

to move. I managed to exclaim: "Enough, Jacques, enough!" But he was no longer looking at me. He was watching Mirza in a fixed and frightful manner. Then she closed her eyes and let her head drop as one does on going to sleep. He turned around to me, exclaiming: "It's all done. Now watch."

He then threw his handkerchief to the other side of the room and called: "Fetch it!"

The beast arose, staggering, stumbling, as if she were blind, moving her legs like a paralytic, and went straight for the piece of cloth, which made a white spot against the wall. Several times she tried to seize it in her mouth, but she would snatch at one side of it, as if she were blind. At last she got it and returned with the same swaying walk of a sleep-walking dog.

It was a terrifying thing to see. He commanded: "Lie down." She obeyed. Then he touched her head and said: "There is a hare, go after it!" And the beast, still on its side, tried to run, kicked about like a dog dreaming, and, without opening its mouth, barked strangely, like a ventriloquist.

Jacques seemed to have gone insane. Perspiration was rolling from his brow. "Bite your master! bite him!" he cried. She started violently two or three times. She looked as if she were resisting, struggling. He repeated: "Bite him!" Then, standing up, my dog came toward me, and I backed away toward the wall, shaking with fear, my foot ready to kick, to push her away. But Jacques exclaimed: "Come here, come immediately!" She returned to him. Then with his two large hands he began to rub her head as if he were freeing her from in-

visible bonds. Mirza opened her eyes and he said to her: "It's all over."

I did not dare touch her, and I pushed open the door so that she could get out. She left slowly, trembling, worn out, and I once more heard her descending the steps.

But Jacques returned to me, saying: "That's not all. What terrifies me most is this, look. Inanimate objects obey me."

On the table was a kind of stiletto, which was used as a paper-cutter. He stretched out his hand to it. He stretched it out slowly, with a gliding motion. Suddenly I saw—yes, I saw the knife itself tremble, move and then slide gently, all alone, over the table toward the motionless hand which was awaiting it, and it crept into his fingers! I cried out in terror. I thought that I was becoming insane myself, but the sharp sound of my voice suddenly calmed me.

Jacques continued: "All objects come to me like that. That is why I hide my hands. What is this? Magnetism, electricity? I don't know, but it's horrible. And can you understand why it's horrible? As soon as I am alone I cannot help attracting everything that is about me. I spend days at a time changing things about me, always trying this abominable power, as if to see whether it has not left me."

He had pushed his large hands into his pockets and was looking out into the night. A slight sound, a little shiver seemed to pass through the trees. It was beginning to rain.

I murmured: "It's frightful!"

He repeated: "It's horrible!"

Something seemed to rush through the foliage

like a sudden gust of wind. It was the shower, a torrential downpour. Jacques began to take in great breaths of air, which filled his lungs; then he exclaimed: "Leave me now; the rain will quiet me. I wish to be alone."

THE TEST

THE Bondels were a happy family, and although they frequently quarrelled about trifles, they soon became friends again.

Bondel was a merchant who had retired from active business after saving enough to allow him to live quietly; he had rented a little house at Saint-Germain and lived there with his wife. He was a quiet man with very decided opinions; he had a certain degree of education and read serious newspapers; nevertheless, he appreciated the *gaulois* wit. Endowed with a logical mind, and that practical common sense which is the master quality of the industrial French *bourgeois,* he thought little, but clearly, and reached a decision only after careful consideration of the matter in hand. He was of medium size, with a distinguished look, and was beginning to turn gray.

His wife, who was full of serious qualities, had also several faults. She had a quick temper and a frankness that bordered upon violence. She bore a grudge a long time. She had once been pretty, but had now become too stout and too red; but in her neighborhood at Saint-Germain she still passed for a very beautiful woman, who exemplified health and an uncertain temper.

Their dissensions almost always began at breakfast, over some trivial matter, and they often con-

tinued all day and even until the following day. Their simple, common, limited life imparted seriousness to the most unimportant matters, and every topic of conversation became a subject of dispute. This had not been so in the days when business occupied their minds, drew their hearts together, and gave them common interests and occupation.

But at Saint-Germain they saw fewer people. It had been necessary to make new acquaintances, to create for themselves a new world among strangers, a new existence devoid of occupations. Then the monotony of loneliness had soured each of them a little; and the quiet happiness which they had hoped and waited for with the coming of riches did not appear.

One June morning, just as they were sitting down to breakfast, Bondel asked:

"Do you know the people who live in the little red cottage at the end of the Rue du Berceau?"

Madame Bondel was out of sorts. She answered:

"Yes and no; I am acquainted with them, but I do not care to know them."

"Why not? They seem to be very nice."

"Because——"

"This morning I met the husband on the terrace and we took a little walk together."

Seeing that there was danger in the air, Bondel added: "It was he who spoke to me first."

His wife looked at him in a displeased manner. She continued: "You would have done just as well to avoid him."

"Why?"

"Because there are rumors about them."

"What kind?"

"Oh! rumors such as one often hears!"

M. Bondel was, unfortunately, a little hasty. He exclaimed:

"My dear, you know that I abhor gossip. As for those people, I find them very pleasant."

She asked testily: "The wife also?"

"Why, yes; although I have barely seen her."

The discussion gradually grew more heated, always on the same subject for lack of others. Madame Bondel obstinately refused to say what she had heard about these neighbors, allowing things to be understood without saying exactly what they were. Bondel would shrug his shoulders, grin, and exasperate his wife. She finally cried out: "Well! that gentleman is deceived by his wife, there!"

The husband answered quietly: "I can't see how that affects the honor of a man."

She seemed dumfounded: "What! you don't see?—you don't see?—well, that's too much! You don't see!—why, it's a public scandal! he is disgraced!"

He answered: "Ah! by no means! Should a man be considered disgraced because he is deceived, because he is betrayed, robbed? No, indeed! I'll grant you that that may be the case for the wife, but as for him——"

She became furious, exclaiming: "For him as well as for her. They are both in disgrace; it's a public shame."

Bondel, very calm, asked: "First of all, is it true? Who can assert such a thing as long as no one has been caught in the act?"

Madame Bondel was growing uneasy; she snapped: "What? Who can assert it? Why, every-

body! everybody! it's as clear as the nose on your face. Everybody knows it and is talking about it. There is not the slightest doubt."

He was grinning: "For a long time people thought that the sun revolved around the earth. This man loves his wife and speaks of her tenderly and reverently. This whole business is nothing but lies!"

Stamping her foot, she stammered: "Do you think that that fool, that idiot, knows anything about it?"

Bondel did not grow angry; he was reasoning clearly: "Excuse me. This gentleman is no fool. He seemed to me, on the contrary, to be very intelligent and shrewd; and you can't make me believe that a man with brains doesn't notice such a thing in his own house, when the neighbors, who are not there, are ignorant of no detail of this *liaison*—for I'll warrant that they know everything."

Madame Bondel had a fit of angry mirth, which irritated her husband's nerves. She laughed: "Ha! ha! ha! they're all the same! There's not a man alive who could discover a thing like that unless his nose was stuck into it!"

The discussion was wandering to other topics now. She was exclaiming over the blindness of deceived husbands, a thing which he doubted and which she affirmed with such airs of personal contempt that he finally grew angry. Then the discussion became an angry quarrel, where she took the side of the women and he defended the men. He had the conceit to declare: "Well, I swear that if I had ever been deceived, I should have noticed it, and immediately, too. And I should have taken away your desire for such things in such a manner

that it would have taken more than one doctor to set you on foot again!"

Boiling with anger, she cried out to him: "You! you! why, you're as big a fool as the others, do you hear!"

He still maintained: "I can swear to you that I am not!"

She laughed so impertinently that he felt his heart beat and a chill run down his back. For the third time he said:

"*I* should have seen it!"

She rose, still laughing in the same manner. She slammed the door and left the room, saying: "Well! if that isn't too much!"

II

Bondel remained alone, ill at ease. That insolent, provoking laugh had touched him to the quick. He went outside, walked, dreamed. The realization of the loneliness of his new life made him sad and morbid. The neighbor, whom he had met that morning, came to him with outstretched hands. They continued their walk together. After touching on various subjects they came to talk of their wives. Both seemed to have something to confide, something inexpressible, vague, about these beings associated with their lives; their wives. The neighbor was saying:

"Really, at times, one might think that they bear some particular ill-will toward their husband, just because he is a husband. I love my wife—I love her very much; I appreciate and respect her; well!

there are times when she seems to have more confidence and faith in our friends than in me."

Bondel immediately thought: "There is no doubt; my wife was right!"

When he left this man he began to think things over again. He felt in his soul a strange confusion of contradictory ideas, a sort of interior burning; that mocking, impertinent laugh kept ringing in his ears and seemed to say: "Why, you are just the same as the others, you fool!" That was indeed bravado, one of those pieces of impudence of which a woman makes use when she dares everything, risks everything, to wound and humiliate the man who has aroused her ire. This poor man must also be one of those deceived husbands, like so many others. He had said sadly: "There are times when she seems to have more confidence and faith in our friends than in me." That is how a husband formulated his observations on the particular attentions of his wife for another man. That was all. He had seen nothing more. He was like the rest—all the rest!

And how strangely Bondel's own wife had laughed as she said: "You, too—you, too." How wild and imprudent these creatures are who can arouse such suspicions in the heart for the sole purpose of revenge!

He ran over their whole life since their marriage, reviewed his mental list of their acquaintances, to see whether she had ever appeared to show more confidence in any one else than in himself. He never had suspected any one, he was so calm, so sure of her, so confident.

But, now he thought of it, she had had a friend, an intimate friend, who for almost a year had dined

with them three times a week. Tancret, good old Tancret, whom he, Bondel, loved as a brother and whom he continued to see on the sly, since his wife, he did not know why, had grown angry at the charming fellow.

He stopped to think, looking over the past with anxious eyes. Then he grew angry at himself for harboring this shameful insinuation of the defiant, jealous, bad ego which lives in all of us. He blamed and accused himself when he remembered the visits and the demeanor of this friend whom his wife had dismissed for no apparent reason. But, suddenly, other memories returned to him, similar ruptures due to the vindictive character of Madame Bondel, who never pardoned a slight. Then he laughed frankly at himself for the doubts which he had nursed; and he remembered the angry looks of his wife as he would tell her, when he returned at night: "I saw good old Tancret, and he wished to be remembered to you," and he reassured himself.

She would invariably answer: "When you see that gentleman you can tell him that I can very well dispense with his remembrances." With what an irritated, angry look she would say these words! How well one could feel that she did not and would not forgive—and he had suspected her even for a second? Such foolishness!

But why did she grow so angry? She never had given the exact reason for this quarrel. She still bore him that grudge! Was it?—But no—no—and Bondel declared that he was lowering himself by even thinking of such things.

Yes, he was undoubtedly lowering himself, but he could not help thinking of it, and he asked him-

self with terror if this thought which had entered into his mind had not come to stop, if he did not carry in his heart the seed of fearful torment. He knew himself; he was a man to think over his doubts, as formerly he would ruminate over his commercial operations, for days and nights, endlessly weighing the pros and the cons.

He was already becoming excited; he was walking fast and losing his calmness. A thought cannot be downed. It is intangible, cannot be caught, cannot be killed.

Suddenly a plan occurred to him; it was bold, so bold that at first he doubted whether he would carry it out.

Each time that he met Tancret, his friend would ask for news of Madame Bondel, and Bondel would answer: "She is still a little angry." Nothing more. Good Lord! What a fool he had been! Perhaps!——

Well, he would take the train to Paris, go to Tancret, and bring him back with him that very evening, assuring him that his wife's mysterious anger had disappeared. But how would Madame Bondel act? What a scene there would be! What anger! what scandal! What of it?—that would be revenge! When she should come face to face with him, unexpectedly, he certainly ought to be able to read the truth in their expressions.

III

He immediately went to the station, bought his ticket, got into the car, and as soon as he felt himself being carried away by the train, he felt a fear,

a kind of dizziness, at what he was going to do. In order not to weaken, back down, and return alone, he tried not to think of the matter any longer, to bring his mind to bear on other affairs, to do what he had decided to do with a blind resolution; and he began to hum tunes from operettas and music halls until he reached Paris.

As soon as he found himself walking along the streets that led to Tancret's, he felt like stopping. He paused in front of several shops, noticed the prices of certain objects, was interested in new things, felt like taking a glass of beer, which was not his usual custom; and as he approached his friend's dwelling he ardently hoped not meet him. But Tancret was at home, alone, reading. He jumped up in surprise, crying: "Ah! Bondel! what luck!"

Bondel, embarrassed, answered: "Yes, my dear fellow, I happened to be in Paris, and I thought I'd drop in and shake hands with you."

"That's very nice, very nice! The more so that for some time you have not favored me with your presence very often."

"Well, you see—even against one's will, one is often influenced by surrounding conditions, and as my wife seemed to bear you some ill-will——"

"Jove! 'seemed'—she did better than that, since she showed me the door."

"What was the reason? I never heard it."

"Oh! nothing at all—a bit of foolishness—a discussion in which we did not both agree."

"But what was the subject of this discussion?"

"A lady of my acquaintance, whom you may perhaps know by name, Madame Boutin."

"Ah! really. Well, I think that my wife has for-

gotten her grudge, for this very morning she spoke to me of you in very pleasant terms."

Tancret started and seemed so dumfounded that for a few minutes he could find nothing to say. Then he asked: "She spoke of me—in pleasant terms?"

"Yes."

"You are sure?"

"Of course I am. I am not dreaming."

"And then?"

"And then—as I was coming to Paris I thought that I would please you by coming to tell you the good news."

"Why, yes—why, yes——"

Bondel appeared to hesitate; then, after a short pause, he added: "I even had an idea."

"What is it?"

"To take you back home with me to dinner."

Tancret,who was naturally prudent, seemed a little worried by this proposition, and he asked: "Oh! really—is it possible? Are we not exposing ourselves to—to—a scene?"

"No, no, indeed!"

"Because, you know, Madame Bondel bears malice for a long time."

"Yes, but I can assure you that she no longer bears you any ill-will. I am even convinced that it will be a great pleasure for her to see you thus, unexpectedly."

"Really?"

"Yes, really!"

"Well, then! let us go along. I am delighted. You see, this misunderstanding was very unpleasant for me."

They set out together toward the Saint-Lazare

station, arm in arm. They made the trip in silence. Both seemed absorbed in deep meditation. Seated in the car, one opposite the other, they looked at each other without speaking, each observing that the other was pale.

Then they left the train and once more linked arms as if to unite against some common danger. After a walk of a few minutes they stopped, a little out of breath, before Bondel's house. Bondel ushered his friend into the parlor, called the servant, and asked: "Is madame at home?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Please ask her to come down at once."

They dropped into two armchairs and waited. Both were filled with the same longing to escape before the appearance of the much-feared person.

A well-known, heavy tread could be heard descending the stairs. A hand moved the knob, and both men watched the brass handle turn. Then the door opened wide, and Madame Bondel stopped and looked to see who was there before she entered. She looked, blushed, trembled, retreated a step, then stood motionless, her cheeks aflame and her hands resting against the sides of the door frame.

Tancret, as pale as if about to faint, had arisen, letting fall his hat, which rolled along the floor. He stammered out: *"Mon Dieu*—madame—it is I—I thought—I ventured—I was so sorry——"

As she did not answer, he continued: "Will you forgive me?"

Then, quickly, carried away by some impulse, she walked toward him with her hands outstretched; and when he had taken, pressed, and held these two

hands, she said, in a trembling, weak little voice, which was new to her husband:

"Ah! my dear friend—how happy I am!"

And Bondel, who was watching them, felt an icy chill run over him, as if he had been dipped in a cold bath.

TWO LITTLE SOLDIERS

EVERY Sunday, as soon as they were free, the little soldiers would go for a walk. They turned to the right on leaving the barracks, crossed Courbevoie with rapid strides, as though on a forced march; then, as the houses grew scarcer, they slowed down and followed the dusty road which leads to Bezons.

They were small and thin, lost in their ill-fitting capes, too large and too long, whose sleeves covered their hands; their ample red trousers fell in folds around their ankles. Under the high, stiff shako one could just barely perceive two thin, hollow-cheeked Breton faces, with their calm, naïve blue eyes. They never spoke during their journey, going straight before them, the same idea in each one's mind taking the place of conversation. For at the entrance of the little forest of Champioux they had found a spot which reminded them of home, and they did not feel happy anywhere else.

At the crossing of the Colombes and Chatou roads, when they arrived under the trees, they would take off their heavy, oppressive headgear and wipe their foreheads.

They always stopped for a while on the bridge at Bezons, and looked at the Seine. They stood there several minutes, bending over the railing, watching the white sails, which perhaps reminded them of

their home, and of the fishing smacks leaving for the open.

As soon as they had crossed the Seine, they would purchase provisions at the delicatessen, the baker's, and the wine merchant's. A piece of bologna, four cents' worth of bread, and a quart of wine, made up the luncheon which they carried away, wrapped up in their handkerchiefs. But as soon as they were out of the village their gait would slacken and they would begin to talk.

Before them was a plain with a few clumps of trees, which led to the woods, a little forest which seemed to remind them of that other forest at Kermarivan. The wheat and oat fields bordered on the narrow path, and Jean Kerderen said each time to Luc Le Ganidec:

"I's just like home, just like Plounivon."

"Yes, it's just like home."

And they went on, side by side, their minds full of dim memories of home. They saw the fields, the hedges, the forests, and beaches.

Each time they stopped near a large stone on the edge of the private estate, because it reminded them of the dolmen of Locneuven.

As soon as they reached the first clump of trees, Luc Le Ganidec would cut off a small stick, and, whittling it slowly, would walk on, thinking of the folks at home.

Jean Kerderen carried the provisions.

From time to time Luc would mention a name, or allude to some boyish prank which would give them food for plenty of thought. And the home country, so dear and so distant, would little by little gain possession of their minds, sending them back

through space, to the well-known forms and noises, to the familiar scenery, with the fragrance of its green fields and sea air. They no longer noticed the smells of the city. And in their dreams they saw their friends leaving, perhaps forever, for the dangerous fishing grounds.

They were walking slowly, Luc Le Ganidec and Jean Kerderen, contented and sad, haunted by a sweet sorrow, the slow and penetrating sorrow of a captive animal which remembers the days of its freedom.

And when Luc had finished whittling his stick, they came to a little nook, where every Sunday they took their meal. They found the two bricks, which they had hidden in a hedge, and they made a little fire of dry branches and roasted their sausages on the ends of their knives.

When their last crumb of bread had been eaten and the last drop of wine had been drunk, they stretched themselves out on the grass side by side, without speaking, their half-closed eyes looking away in the distance, their hands clasped as in prayer, their red-trousered legs mingling with the bright colors of the wild flowers.

Towards noon they glanced, from time to time, towards the village of Bezons, for the dairy maid would soon be coming. Every Sunday she would pass in front of them on the way to milk her cow, the only cow in the neighborhood which was sent out to pasture.

Soon they would see the girl, coming through the fields, and it pleased them to watch the sparkling sunbeams reflected from her shining pail. They

never spoke of her. They were just glad to see her, without understanding why.

She was a tall, strapping girl, freckled and tanned by the open air—a girl typical of the Parisian suburbs.

Once, on noticing that they were always sitting in the same place, she said to them:

"Do you always come here?"

Luc Le Ganidec, more daring than his friend, stammered:

"Yes, we come here for our rest."

That was all. But the following Sunday, on seeing them, she smiled with the kindly smile of a woman who understood their shyness, and she asked:

"What are you doing here? Are you watching the grass grow?"

Luc, cheered up, smiled: "P'raps."

She continued: "It's not growing fast, is it?"

He answered, still laughing: "Not exactly."

She went ont. But when she came back with her pail full of milk, she stopped before them and said:

"Want some? It will remind you of home."

She had, perhaps instinctively, guessed and touched the right spot.

Both were moved. Then, not without difficulty, she poured some milk into the bottle in which they had brought their wine. Luc started to drink, carefully watching lest he should take more than his share. Then he passed the bottle to Jean. She stood before them, her hands on her hips, her pail at her feet, enjoying the pleasure that she was giving them. Then she went on, saying: "Well, bye-bye until next Sunday!"

For a long time they watched her tall form as it receded in the distance, blending with the background, and finally disappeared.

The following week as they left the barracks, Jean said to Luc:

"Don't you think we ought to buy her something good?"

They were sorely perplexed by the problem of choosing something to bring to the dairy maid. Luc was in favor of bringing her some chitterlings; but Jean, who had a sweet tooth, thought that candy would be the best thing. He won, and so they went to a grocery to buy two sous' worth of red and white candies.

This time they ate more quickly than usual, excited by anticipation.

Jean was the first one to notice her. "There she is," he said; and Luc answered: "Yes, there she is."

She smiled when she saw them, and cried:

"Well, how are you to-day?"

They both answered together:

"All right! How's everything with you?"

Then she started to talk of simple things which might interest them; of the weather, of the crops, of her masters.

They didn't dare to offer their candies, which were slowly melting in Jean's pocket. Finally Luc, growing bolder, murmured:

"We have brought you something."

She asked: "Let's see it."

Then Jean, blushing to the tips of his ears, reached in his pocket, and drawing out the little paper bag, handed it to her.

She began to eat the little sweet dainties. The

two soldiers sat in front of her, moved and delighted.

At last she went to do her milking, and when she came back she again gave them some milk.

They thought of her all through the week and often spoke of her. The following Sunday she sat beside them for a longer time.

The three of them sat there, side by side, their eyes looking far away in the distance, their hands clasped over their knees, and they told each other little incidents and little details of the villages where they were born, while the cow, waiting to be milked, stretched her heavy head toward the girl and mooed.

Soon the girl consented to eat with them, and to take a sip of wine. Often she brought them plums in her pocket, for plums were now ripe. Her presence enlivened the little Breton soldiers, who chattered away like two birds.

One Tuesday something unusual happened to Luc Le Ganidec; he asked for leave and did not return until ten o'clock at night.

Jean, worried and racked his brain to account for his friend's having obtained leave.

The following Friday, Luc borrowed ten sous from one of his friends, and once more asked and obtained leave for several hours.

When he started out with Jean on Sunday he seemed queer, disturbed, changed. Kerderen did not understand; he vaguely suspected something, but he could not guess what it might be.

They went straight to the usual place, and lunched slowly. Neither was hungry.

Soon the girl appeared. They watched her ap-

proach as they always did. When she was near, Luc arose and went towards her. She placed her pail on the ground and kissed him. She kissed him passionately, throwing her arms around his neck, without paying attention to Jean, without even noticing that he was there.

Poor Jean was dazed, so dazed that he could not understand. His mind was upset and his heart broken, without his even realizing why.

Then the girl sat down beside Luc, and they started to chat.

Jean was not looking at them. He understood now why his friend had gone out twice during the week. He felt the pain and the sting which treachery and deceit leave in their wake.

Luc and the girl went together to attend to the cow.

Jean followed them with his eyes. He saw them disappear side by side, the red trousers of his friend making a scarlet spot against the white road. It was Luc who sank the stake to which the cow was tethered. The girl stooped down to milk the cow, while he absent-mindedly stroked the animal's glossy neck. Then they left the pail in the grass and disappeared in the woods.

Jean could no longer see anything but the wall of leaves through which they had passed. He was unmanned so that he did not have strength to stand. He stayed there, motionless, bewildered and grieving—simple, passionate grief. He wanted to weep, to run away, to hide somewhere, never to see anyone again.

Then he saw them coming back again. They were

walking slowly, hand in hand, as village lovers do. Luc was carrying the pail.

After kissing him again, the girl went on, nodding carelessly to Jean. She did not offer him any milk that day.

The two little soldiers sat side by side, motionless as always, silent and quiet, their calm faces in no way betraying the trouble in their hearts. The sun shone down on them. From time to time they could hear the plaintive lowing of the cow. At the usual time they arose to return.

Luc was whittling a stick. Jean carried the empty bottle. He left it at the wine merchant's in Bezons. Then they stopped on the bridge, as they did every Sunday, and watched the water flowing by.

Jean leaned over the railing, farther and farther, as though he had seen something in the stream which hypnotized him. Luc said to him:

"What's the matter? Do you want a drink?"

He had hardly said the last word when Jean's head carried away the rest of his body, and the little blue and red soldier fell like a shot and disappeared in the water.

Luc, paralyzed with horror, tried vainly to shout for help. In the distance he saw something move; then his friend's head bobbed up out of the water only to disappear again.

Farther down he again noticed a hand, just one hand, which appeared and again went out of sight. That was all.

The boatmen who had rushed to the scene found no body that day.

Luc ran back to the barracks, crazed, and with

eyes and voice full of tears, he related the accident: "He leaned—he—he was leaning—so far over—that his head carried him away—and—he—fell—he fell——"

Emotion choked him so that he could say no more. If he had only known!

COCO

THROUGHOUT the whole countryside the Lucas farm was known as "the Manor." No one knew why. The peasants doubtless attached to this word, "Manor," a meaning of wealth and of splendor, for this farm was undoubtedly the largest, richest and the best managed in the whole neighborhood.

The immense court, surrounded by five rows of magnificent trees, which sheltered the delicate apple trees from the harsh wind of the plain, inclosed in its confines long brick buildings used for storing fodder and grain, beautiful stables built of hard stone and made to accommodate thirty horses, and a red brick residence which looked like a little château.

Thanks for the good care taken, the manure heaps were as little offensive as such things can be; the watch-dogs lived in kennels, and countless poultry paraded through the tall grass.

Every day, at noon, fifteen persons, masters, farmhands and the women folks, seated themselves around the long kitchen table where the soup was brought in steaming in a large, blue-flowered bowl.

The beasts—horses, cows, pigs and sheep—were fat, well fed and clean. Maître Lucas, a tall man who was getting stout, would go round three times

a day, overseeing everything and thinking of everything.

A very old white horse, which the mistress wished to keep until its natural death, because she had brought it up and had always used it, and also because it recalled many happy memories, was housed, through sheer kindness of heart, at the end of the stable.

A young scamp about fifteen years old, Isidore Duval by name, and called, for convenience, Zidore, took care of this pensioner, gave him his measure of oats and fodder in winter, and in summer was supposed to change his pasturing place four times a day, so that he might have plenty of fresh grass.

The animal, almost crippled, lifted with difficulty his legs, large at the knees and swollen above the hoofs. His coat, which was no longer curried, looked like white hair, and his long eyelashes gave to his eyes a sad expression.

When Zidore toak the animal to pasture, he had to pull on the rope with all his might, because it walked so slowly; and the youth, bent over and out of breath, would swear at it, exasperated at having to care for this old nag.

The farmhands, noticing the young rascal's anger against Coco, were amused and would continually talk of the horse to Zidore, in order to exasperate him. His comrades would make sport with him. In the village he was called Coco-Zidore.

The boy would fume, feeling an unholy desire to revenge himself on the horse. He was a thin, long-legged, dirty child, with thick, coarse, bristly red hair. He seemed only half-witted, and stuttered as

though ideas were unable to form in his thick, brute-like mind.

For a long time he had been unable to understand why Coco should be kept, indignant at seeing things wasted on this useless beast. Since the horse could no longer work, it seemed to him unjust that he should be fed; he revolted at the idea of wasting oats, oats which were so expensive, on this paralyzed old plug. And often, in spite of the orders of Maître Lucas, he would economize on the nag's food, only giving him half measure. Hatred grew in his confused, childlike mind, the hatred of a stingy, mean, fierce, brutal and cowardly peasant.

When summer came he had to move the animal about in the pasture. It was some distance away. The rascal, angrier every morning, would start, with his dragging step, across the wheat fields. The men working in the fields would shout to him, jokingly:

"Hey, Zidore, remember me to Coco."

He would not answer; but on the way he would break off a switch, and, as soon as he had moved the old horse, he would let it begin grazing; then, treacherously sneaking up behind it, he would slash its legs. The animal would try to escape, to kick, to get away from the blows, and run around in a circle about its rope, as though it had been inclosed in a circus ring. And the boy would slash away furiously, running along behind, his teeth clenched in anger.

Then he would go away slowly, without turning round, while the horse watched him disappear, his ribs sticking out, panting as a result of his unusual

exertions. Not until the blue blouse of the young peasant was out of sight would he lower his thin white head to the grass.

As the nights were now warm, Coco was allowed to sleep out of doors, in the field behind the little wood. Zidore alone went to see him.

The boy threw stones at him to amuse himself. He would sit down on an embankment about ten feet away and would stay there about half an hour, from time to time throwing a sharp stone at the old horse, which remained standing tied before his enemy, watching him continually and not daring to eat before he was gone.

This one thought persisted in the mind of the young scamp: "Why feed this horse, which is no longer good for anything?" It seemed to him that this old nag was stealing the food of the others, the goods of man and God, that he was even robbing him, Zidore, who was working.

Then, little by little, each day, the boy began to shorten the length of rope which allowed the horse to graze.

The hungry animal was growing thinner, and starving. Too feeble to break his bonds, he would stretch his head out toward the tall, green, tempting grass, so near that he could smell, and yet so far that he could not touch it.

But one morning Zidore had an idea: it was, not to move Coco any more. He was tired of walking so far for that old skeleton.

He came, however, in order to enjoy his vengeance. The beast watched him anxiously. He did not beat him that day. He walked around him with his hands in his pockets. He even pretended

to change his place, but he sank the stake in exactly the same hole, and went away overjoyed with his invention.

The horse, seeing him leave, neighed to call him back; but the rascal began to run, leaving him alone, entirely alone in his field, well tied down and without a blade of grass within reach.

Starving, he tried to reach the grass which he could touch with the end of his nose. He got on his knees, stretching out his neck and his long, drooling lips. All in vain. The old animal spent the whole day in useless, terrible efforts. The sight of all that green food, which stretched out on all sides of him, served to increase the gnawing pangs of hunger.

The scamp did not return that day. He wandered through the woods in search of nests.

The next day he appeared upon the scene again. Coco, exhausted, had lain down. When he saw the boy, he got up, expecting at last to have his place changed.

But the little peasant did not even touch the mallet, which was lying on the ground. He came nearer, looked at the animal, threw at his head a clump of earth which flattened out against the white hair, and he started off again, whistling.

The horse remained standing as long as he could see him; then, knowing that his attempts to reach the near-by grass would be hopeless, he once more lay down on his side and closed his eyes.

The following day Zidore did not come.

When he did come at last, he found Coco still stretched out; he saw that he was dead.

Then he remained standing, looking at him,

pleased with what he had done, surprised that it should already be all over. He touched him with his foot, lifted one of his legs and then let it drop, sat on him and remained there, his eyes fixed on the grass, thinking of nothing. He returned to the farm, but did not mention the accident, because he wished to wander about at the hours when he used to change the horse's pasture.

He went to see him the next day. At his approach some crows flew away. Countless flies were walking over the body and were buzzing around it.

When he returned home, he announced the event. The animal was so old that nobody was surprised. The master said to two of the men:

"Take your shovels and dig a hole right where he is."

The men buried the horse at the place where he had died of hunger.

And the grass grew thick, green and vigorous, fed by the poor body.

THE HORRIBLE

THE shadows of a balmy night were slowly falling. The women remained in the drawing-room of the villa. The men, seated, or astride of garden chairs, were smoking outside the door of the house, around a table laden with cups and liqueur glasses.

Their lighted cigars shone like eyes in the darkness, which was gradually becoming more dense. They had been talking about a frightful accident which had occurred the night before—two men and three women drowned in the river before the eyes of the guests.

General de G—— remarked:

"Yes, these things are affecting, but they are not horrible.

"Horrible, that well-known word, means much more than terrible. A frightful accident like this affects, upsets, terrifies; it does not horrify. In order that we should experience horror, something more is needed than emotion, something more than the spectacle of a dreadful death; there must be a shuddering sense of mystery, or a sensation of abnormal terror, more than natural. A man who dies, even under the most tragic circumstances, does not excite horror; a field of battle is not horrible; blood is not horrible; the vilest crimes are rarely horrible.

"Here are two personal examples which have shown me what is the meaning of horror.

"It was during the war of 1870. We were retreating toward Pont-Audemer, after having passed through Rouen. The army, consisting of about twenty thousand men, twenty thousand routed men, disbanded, demoralized, exhausted, were going to disband at Havre.

"The earth was covered with snow. The night was falling. They had not eaten anything since the day before. They were fleeing rapidly, the Prussians not being far off.

"All the Norman country, sombre, dotted with the shadows of the trees surrounding the farms, stretched out beneath a black, heavy, threatening sky.

"Nothing else could be heard in the wan twilight but the confused sound, undefined though rapid, of a marching throng, an endless tramping, mingled with the vague clink of tin bowls or swords. The men, bent, round-shouldered, dirty, in many cases even in rags, dragged themselves along, hurried through the snow, with a long, broken-backed stride.

"The skin of their hands froze to the butt ends of their muskets, for it was freezing hard that night. I frequently saw a little soldier take off his shoes in order to walk barefoot, as his shoes hurt his weary feet; and at every step he left a track of blood. Then, after some time, he would sit down in a field for a few minutes' rest, and he never got up again. Every man who sat down was a dead man.

"Should we have left behind us those poor, exhausted soldiers, who fondly counted on being able

to start afresh as soon as they had somewhat refreshed their stiffened legs? But scarcely had they ceased to move, and to make their almost frozen blood circulate in their veins, than an unconquerable torpor congealed them, nailed them to the ground, closed their eyes, and paralyzed in one second this overworked human mechanism. And they gradually sank down, their foreheads on their knees, without, however, falling over, for their loins and their limbs became as hard and immovable as wood, impossible to bend or to stand upright.

'And the rest of us, more robust, kept straggling on, chilled to the marrow, advancing by a kind of inertia through the night, through the snow, through that cold and deadly country, crushed by pain, by defeat, by despair, above all overcome by the abominable sensation of abandonment, of the end, of death, of nothingness.

"I saw two gendarmes holding by the arm a curious-looking little man, old, beardless, of truly surprising aspect.

"They were looking for an officer, believing that they had caught a spy. The word 'spy' at once spread through the midst of the stragglers, and they gathered in a group round the prisoner. A voice exclaimed: 'He must be shot!' And all these soldiers who were falling from utter prostration, only holding themselves on their feet by leaning on their guns, felt all of a sudden that thrill of furious and bestial anger which urges on a mob to massacre.

"I wanted to speak. I was at that time in command of a battalion; but they no longer recognized

the authority of their commanding officers; they would even have shot me.

"One of the gendarmes said: 'He has been following us for the three last days. He has been asking information from every one about the artillery.'

"I took it on myself to question this person.

"'What are you doing? What do you want? Why are you accompanying the army?'

"He stammered out some words in some unintelligible dialect. He was, indeed, a strange being, with narrow shoulders, a sly look, and such an agitated air in my presence that I really no longer doubted that he was a spy. He seemed very aged and feeble. He kept looking at me from under his eyes with a humble, stupid, crafty air.

"The men all round us exclaimed:

"'To the wall! To the wall!'

"I said to the gendarmes:

"'Will you be responsible for the prisoner?'

"I had not ceased speaking when a terrible shove threw me on my back, and in a second I saw the man seized by the furious soldiers, thrown down, struck, dragged along the side of the road, and flung against a tree. He fell in the snow, nearly dead already.

"And immediately they shot him. The soldiers fired at him, reloaded their guns, fired again with the desperate energy of brutes. They fought with each other to have a shot at him, filed off in front of the corpse, and kept on firing at him, as people at a funeral keep sprinkling holy water in front of a coffin.

"But suddenly a cry arose of 'The Prussians! the Prussians!'

"And all along the horizon I heard the great noise of this panic-stricken army in full flight.

"A panic, the result of these shots fired at this vagabond, had filled his very executioners with terror; and, without realizing that they were themselves the originators of the scare, they fled and disappeared in the darkness.

"I remained alone with the corpse, except for the two gendarmes whose duty compelled them to stay with me.

"They lifted up the riddled mass of bruised and bleeding flesh.

"'He must be searched,' I said. And I handed them a box of taper matches which I had in my pocket. One of the soldiers had another box. I was standing between the two.

"The gendarme who was examining the body announced:

"'Clothed in a blue blouse, a white shirt, trousers, and a pair of shoes.'

"The first match went out; we lighted a second. The man continued, as he turned out his pockets:

"'A horn-handled pocketknife, check handkerchief, a snuffbox, a bit of pack thread, a piece of bread.'

"The second match went out; we lighted a third. The gendarme, after having felt the corpse for a long time, said:

"'That is all.'

"I said:

"'Strip him. We shall perhaps find something next his skin."

"And in order that the two soldiers might help each other in this task, I stood between them to hold the lighted match. By the rapid and speedily extinguished flame of the match, I saw them take off the garments one by one, and expose to view that bleeding bundle of flesh, still warm, though lifeless.

"And suddenly one of them exclaimed:

" 'Good God, general, it is a woman!'

"I cannot describe to you the strange and poignant sensation of pain that moved my heart. I could not believe it, and I knelt down in the snow before this shapeless pulp of flesh to see for myself: it was a woman.

"The two gendarmes, speechless and stunned, waited for me to give my opinion on the matter. But I did not know what to think, what theory to adopt.

"Then the brigadier slowly drawled out:

" 'Perhaps she came to look for a son of hers in the artillery, whom she had not heard from.'

"And the other chimed in:

" 'Perhaps, indeed, that is so.'

"And I, who had seen some very terrible things in my time, began to cry. And I felt, in the presence of this corpse, on that icy cold night, in the midst of that gloomy plain, at the sight of this mystery, at the sight of this murdered stranger, the meaning of that word 'horror.'

"I had the same sensation last year, while interrogating one of the survivors of the Flatters Mission, an Algerian sharpshooter.

"You know the details of that atrocious drama. It is possible, however, that you are unacquainted with one of them.

"The colonel travelled through the desert into the Soudan, and passed through the immense territory of the Touaregs, who, in that great ocean of sand which stretches from the Atlantic to Egypt and from the Soudan to Algeria, are a kind of pirates, resembling those who ravaged the seas in former days.

"The guides who accompanied the column belonged to the tribe of the Chambaa, of Ouargla.

"Now, one day we encamped in the middle of the desert, and the Arabs declared that, as the spring was still some distance away, they would go with all their camels to look for water.

"One man alone warned the colonel that he had been betrayed. Flatters did not believe this, and accompanied the convoy with the engineers, the doctors, and nearly all his officers.

"They were massacred round the spring, and all the camels were captured.

"The captain of the Arab Intelligence Department at Ouargla, who had remained in the camp, took command of the survivors, spahis and sharpshooters, and they began to retreat, leaving behind them the baggage and provisions, for want of camels to carry them.

"Then they started on their journey through this solitude without shade and boundless, beneath the devouring sun, which burned them from morning till night.

"One tribe came to tender its submission and brought dates as a tribute. The dates were poisoned. Nearly all the Frenchmen died, and, among them, the last officer.

"There now only remained a few spahis with

their quartermaster, Pobéguin, and some native sharpshooters of the Chambaa tribe. They had still two camels left. They disappeared one night, along with two Arabs.

"Then the survivors understood that they would be obliged to eat each other, and as soon as they discovered the flight of the two men with the two camels, those who remained separated, and proceeded to march, one by one, through the soft sand, under the glare of a scorching sun, at a distance of more than a gunshot from each other.

"So they went on all day, and when they reached a spring each of them came to drink at it in turn, as soon as each solitary marcher had moved forward the number of yards arranged upon. And thus they continued marching the whole day, raising everywhere they passed, in that level, burnt-up expanse, those little columns of dust which, from a distance, indicate those who are trudging through the desert.

"But one morning one of the travellers suddenly turned round and approached the man behind him. And they all stopped to look.

"The man toward whom the famished soldier drew near did not flee, but lay flat on the ground, and took aim at the one who was coming toward him. When he believed he was within gunshot, he fired. The other was not hit, and he continued then to advance, and levelling his gun, in turn, he killed his comrade.

"Then from all directions the others rushed to seek their share. And he who had killed the fallen man, cutting the corpse into pieces, distributed it.

"And they once more placed themselves at fixed

distances, these irreconcilable allies, preparing for the next murder which would bring them together.

"For two days they lived on this human flesh which they divided between them. Then, becoming famished again, he who had killed the first man began killing afresh. And again, like a butcher, he cut up the corpse and offered it to his comrades, keeping only his own portion of it.

"And so this retreat of cannibals continued.

"The last Frenchman, Pobéguin, was massacred at the side of a well, the very night before the supplies arrived.

"Do you understand now what I mean by the horrible?"

This was the story told us a few nights ago by General de G——.

PIERROT

MME. LEFÈVRE was a country dame, a widow, one of these half peasants, with ribbons and bonnets with trimming on them, one of those persons who clipped her words and put on great airs in public, concealing the soul of a pretentious animal beneath a comical and bedizened exterior, just as the country-folks hide their coarse red hands in écru silk gloves.

She had a servant, a good simple peasant, called Rose.

The two women lived in a little house with green shutters by the side of the high road in Normandy, in the centre of the country of Caux. As they had a narrow strip of garden in front of the house, they grew some vegetables.

One night someone stole twelve onions. As soon as Rose became aware of the theft, she ran to tell madame, who came downstairs in her woolen petticoat. It was a shame and a disgrace! They had robbed her, Mme. Lefèvre! As there were thieves in the country, they might come back.

And the two frightened women examined the foot tracks, talking, and supposing all sorts of things.

"See, they went that way! They stepped on the wall, they jumped into the garden!"

And they became apprehensive for the future. How could they sleep in peace now!

The news of the theft spread. The neighbors

came, making examinations and discussing the matter in their turn, while the two women explained to each newcomer what they had observed and their opinion.

A farmer who lived near said to them:

"You ought to have a dog."

That is true, they ought to have a dog, if it were only to give the alarm. Not a big dog. Heavens! what would they do with a big dog? He would eat their heads off. But a little dog (in Normandy they say "quin"), a little puppy who would bark.

As soon as everyone had left, Mme. Lefèvre discussed this idea of a dog for some time. On reflection she made a thousand objections, terrified at the idea of a bowl full of soup, for she belonged to that race of parsimonious country women who always carry centimes in their pocket to give alms in public to beggars on the road and to put in the Sunday collection plate.

Rose, who loved animals, gave her opinion and defended it shrewdly. So it was decided that they should have a dog, a very small dog.

They began to look for one, but could find nothing but big dogs, who would devour enough soup to make one shudder. The grocer of Rolleville had one, a tiny one, but he demanded two francs to cover the cost of sending it. Mme. Lefèvre declared that she would feed a "quin," but would not buy one.

The baker, who knew all that occurred, brought in his wagon one morning a strange little yellow animal, almost without paws, with the body of a crocodile, the head of a fox, and a curly tail—a true cockade, as big as all the rest of him. Mme. Lefèvre thought this common cur that cost nothing was very

handsome. Rose hugged it and asked what its name was.

"Pierrot," replied the baker.

The dog was installed in an old soap box and they gave it some water which it drank. They then offered it a piece of bread. He ate it. Mme. Lefèvre, uneasy, had an idea.

"When he is thoroughly accustomed to the house we can let him run. He can find something to eat, roaming about the country."

They let him run, in fact, which did not prevent him from being famished. Also he never barked except to beg for food, and then he barked furiously.

Anyone might come into the garden, and Pierrot would run up and fawn on each one in turn and not utter a bark.

Mme. Lefèvre, however, had become accustomed to the animal. She even went so far as to like it and to give it from time to time pieces of bread soaked in the gravy on her plate.

But she had not once thought of the dog tax, and when they came to collect eight france—eight francs, madame—for this puppy who never even barked, she almost fainted from the shock.

It was immediately decided that they must get rid of Pierrot. No one wanted him. Every one declined to take him for ten leagues around. Then they resolved, not knowing what else to do, to make him "piquer du mas."

"Piquer du mas" means to eat chalk. When one wants to get rid of a dog they make him "Piquer du mas."

In the midst of an immense plain one sees a kind of hut, or rather a very small roof standing above

the ground. This is the entrance to the clay pit. A big perpendicular hole is sunk for twenty metres underground and ends in a series of long subterranean tunnels.

Once a year they go down into the quarry at the time they fertilize the ground. The rest of the year it serves as a cemetery for condemned dogs, and as one passed by this hole plaintive howls, furious or despairing barks and lamentable appeals reach one's ear.

Sportsmen's dogs and sheep dogs flee in terror from this mournful place, and when one leans over it one perceives a disgusting odor of putrefaction.

Frightful dramas are enacted in the darkness.

When an animal has suffered down there for ten or twelve days, nourished on the foul remains of his predecessors, another animal, larger and more vigorous, is thrown into the hole. There they are, alone, starving, with glittering eyes. They watch each other, follow each other, hesitate in doubt. But hunger impels them; they attack each other, fight desperately for some time, and the stronger eats the weaker, devours him alive.

When it was decided to make Pierrot "piquer du mas" they looked round for an executioner. The laborer who mended the road demanded six sous to take the dog there. That seemed wildly exorbitant to Mme. Lefèvre. The neighbor's hired boy wanted five sous; that was still too much. So Rose having observed that they had better carry it there themselves, as in that way it would not be brutally treated on the way and made to suspect its fate, they resolved to go together at twilight.

They offered the dog that evening a good dish of

soup with a piece of butter in it. He swallowed every morsel of it, and as he wagged his tail with delight Rose put him in her apron.

They walked quickly, like thieves, across the plain. They soon perceived the chalk pit and walked up to it. Mme. Lefèvre leaned over to hear if any animal was moaning. No, there were none there; Pierrot would be alone. Then Rose, who was crying, kissed the dog and threw him into the chalk pit, and they both leaned over, listening.

First they heard a dull sound, then the sharp, bitter, distracting cry of an animal in pain, then a succession of little mournful cries, then despairing appeals, the cries of a dog who is entreating, his head raised toward the opening of the pit.

He yelped, oh, how he yelped!

They were filled with remorse, with terror, with a wild, inexplicable fear, and ran away from the spot. As Rose went faster Mme. Lefèvre cried: "Wait for me, Rose, wait for me!"

At night they were haunted by frightful nightmares.

Mme. Lefèvre dreamed she was sitting down at table to eat her soup, but when she uncovered the tureen Pierrot was in it. He jumped out and bit her nose.

She awoke and thought she heard him yelping still. She listened, but she was mistaken.

She fell asleep again and found herself on a high road, an endless road, which she followed. Suddenly in the middle of the road she perceived a basket, a large farmer's basket, lying there, and this basket frightened her.

She ended by opening it, and Pierrot, concealed in

it, seized her hand and would not let go. She ran away in terror with the dog hanging to the end of her arm, which he held between his teeth.

At daybreak she arose, almost beside herself, and ran to the chalk pit.

He was yelping, yelping still; he had yelped all night. She began to sob and called him by all sorts of endearing names. He answered her with all the tender inflections of his dog's voice.

Then she wanted to see him again, promising herself that she would give him a good home till he died.

She ran to the chalk digger, whose business it was to excavate for chalk, and told him the situation. The man listened, but said nothing. When she had finished he said:

"You want your dog? That will cost four francs." She gave a jump. All her grief was at an end at once.

"Four francs!" she said. "You would die of it! Four francs!"

"Do you suppose I am going to bring my ropes, my windlass, and set it up, and go down there with my boy and let myself be bitten, perhaps, by your cursed dog for the pleasure of giving it back to you? You should not have thrown it down there."

She walked away, indignant. Four francs!

As soon as she entered the house she called Rose and told her of the quarryman's charges. Rose, always resigned, repeated:

"Four francs! That is a good deal of money, madame." Then she added: "If we could throw him something to eat, the poor dog, so he will not die of hunger."

Mme. Lefèvre approved of this and was quite de-

lighted. So they set out again with a big piece of bread and butter.

They cut it in mouthfuls, which they threw down one after the other, speaking by turns to Pierrot. As soon as the dog finished one piece he yelped for the next.

They returned that evening and the next day and every day. But they made only one trip.

One morning as they were just letting fall the first mouthful they suddenly heard a tremendous barking in the pit. There were two dogs there. Another had been thrown in, a large dog.

"Pierrot!" cried Rose. And Pierrot yelped and yelped. Then they began to throw down some food. But each time they noticed distinctly a terrible struggle going on, then plaintive cries from Pierrot, who had been bitten by his companion, who ate up everything as he was the stronger.

It was in vain that they specified, saying:

"That is for you, Pierrot." Pierrot evidently got nothing.

The two women, dumfounded, looked at each other and Mme. Lefèvre said in a sour tone:

"I could not feed all the dogs they throw in there! We must give it up."

And, suffocating at the thought of all the dogs living at her expense, she went away, even carrying back what remained of the bread, which she ate as she walked along.

Rose followed her, wiping her eyes on the corner of her blue apron.

FAREWELL!

THE two friends were getting near the end of their dinner. Through the café windows they could see the Boulevard, crowded with people. They could feel the gentle breezes which are wafted over Paris on warm summer evenings and make you feel like going out somewhere, you care not where, under the trees, and make you dream of moonlit rivers, of fireflies and of larks.

One of the two, Henri Simon, heaved a deep sigh and said:

"Ah! I am growing old. It's sad. Formerly, on evenings like this, I felt full of life. Now, I only feel regrets. Life is short!"

He was perhaps forty-five years old, very bald and already growing stout.

The other, Pierre Carnier, a trifle older, but thin and lively, answered:

"Well, my boy, I have grown old without noticing it in the least. I have always been merry, healthy, vigorous and all the rest. As one sees oneself in the mirror every day, one does not realize the work of age, for it is slow, regular, and it modifies the countenance so gently that the changes are unnoticeable. It is for this reason alone that we do not die of sorrow after two or three years of excitement. For we cannot understand the alterations which time produces. In order to appreciate them

one would have to remain six months without seeing one's own face—then, oh, what a shock!

"And the women, my friend, how I pity the poor beings! All their joy, all their power, all their life, lies in their beauty, which lasts ten years.

"As I said, I aged without noticing it; I thought myself practically a youth, when I was almost fifty years old. Not feeling the slightest infirmity, I went about, happy and peaceful.

"The revelation of my decline came to me in a simple and terrible manner, which overwhelmed me for almost six months—then I became resigned.

"Like all men, I have often been in love, but most especially once.

"I met her at the seashore, at Étretat, about twelve years ago, shortly after the war. There is nothing prettier than this beach during the morning bathing-hour. It is small, shaped like a horseshoe, framed by high, while cliffs, which are pierced by strange holes called the 'Portes,' one stretching out into the ocean like the leg of a giant, the other short and dumpy. The women gather on the narrow strip of sand in this frame of high rocks, which they make into a gorgeous garden of beautiful gowns. The sun beats down on the shores, on the multicolored parasols, on the blue-green sea; and all is gay, delightful, smiling. You sit down at the edge of the water and you watch the bathers. The women come down, wrapped in long bath robes, which they throw off daintily when they reach the foamy edge of the rippling waves; and they run into the water with a rapid little step, stopping from time to time for a delightful little thrill from the cold water, a short gasp.

"Very few stand the test of the bath. It is there that they can be judged, from the ankle to the throat. Especially on leaving the water are the defects revealed, although water is a powerful aid to flabby skin.

"The first time that I saw this young woman in the water, I was delighted, entranced. She stood the test well. There are faces whose charms appeal to you at first glance and delight you instantly. You seem to have found the woman whom you were born to love. I had that feeling and that shock.

"I was introduced, and was soon smitten worse than I had ever been before. My heart longed for her. It is a terrible yet delightful thing thus to be dominated by a young woman. It is almost torture, and yet infinite delight. Her look, her smile, her hair fluttering in the wind, the little lines of her face, the slightest movement of her features, delighted me, upset me, entranced me. She had captured me, body and soul, by her gestures, her manners, even by her clothes, which seemed to take on a peculiar charm as soon as she wore them. I grew tender at the sight of her veil on some piece of furniture, her gloves thrown on a chair. Her gowns seemed to me inimitable. Nobody had hats like hers.

"She was married, but her husband came only on Saturday, and left on Monday. I didn't cencern myself about him, anyhow. I wasn't jealous of him, I don't know why; never did a creature seem to me to be of less importance in life, to attract my attention less than this man.

"But she! how I loved her! How beautiful, graceful and young she was! She was youth, elegance,

freshness itself! Never before had I felt so strongly what a pretty, distinguished, delicate, charming, graceful being woman is. Never before had I appreciated the seductive beauty to be found in the curve of a cheek, the movement of a lip, the pinkness of an ear, the shape of that foolish organ called the nose.

"This lasted three months; then I left for America, overwhelmed with sadness. But her memory remained in me, persistent, triumphant. From far away I was as much hers as I had been when she was near me. Years passed by, and I did not forget her. The charming image of her person was ever before my eyes and in my heart. And my love remained true to her, a quiet tenderness now, something like the beloved memory of the most beautiful and the most enchanting thing I had ever met in my life.

"Twelve years are not much in a lifetime! One does not feel them slip by. The years follow each other gently and quickly, slowly yet rapidly, each one is long and yet so soon over! They add up so rapidly, they leave so few traces behind them, they disappear so completely, that, when one turns round to look back over bygone years, one sees nothing and yet one does not understand how one happens to be so old. It seemed to me, really, that hardly a few months separated me from that charming season on the sands of Étretat.

"Last spring I went to dine with some friends at Maisons-Laffitte.

"Just as the train was leaving, a big, fat lady, escorted by four little girls, got into my car. I

hardly looked at this mother hen, very big, very round, with a face as full as the moon framed in an enormous, beribboned hat.

"She was puffing, out of breath from having been forced to walk quickly. The children began to chatter. I unfolded my paper and began to read.

"We had just passed Asnières, when my neighbor suddenly turned to me and said:

" 'Excuse me, sir, but are you not Monsieur Garnier?'

" 'Yes, madame.'

"Then she began to laugh, the pleased laugh of a good woman; and yet it was sad.

" 'You do not seem to recognize me.'

"I hesitated. It seemed to me that I had seen that face somewhere; but where? when? I answered:

" 'Yes—and no. I certainly know you, and yet I cannot recall your name.'

"She blushed a little:

" 'Madame Julie Lefèvre.'

"Never had I received such a shock. In a second it seemed to me as though it were all over with me! I felt that a veil had been torn from my eyes and that I was going to make a horrible and heart-rending discovery.

"So that was she! That big, fat, common woman, she! She had become the mother of these four girls since I had last her. And these little beings surprised me as much as their mother. They were part of her; they were big girls, and already had a place in life. Whereas she no longer counted, she, that marvel of dainty and charming gracefulness. It seemed to me that I had seen her but yesterday,

and this is how I found her again! Was it possible? A poignant grief seized my heart, and also a revolt against nature herself, an unreasoning indignation against this brutal, infamous act of destruction.

"I looked at her, bewildered. Then I took her hand in mine, and tears came to my eyes. I wept for her lost youth. For I did not know this fat lady.

"She was also excited, and stammered:

"'I am greatly changed, am I not? What can you expect—everything has its time! You see, I have become a mother, nothing but a good mother. Farewell to the rest, that is over. Oh! I never expected you to recognize me if we met. You, too, have changed. It took me quite a while to be sure that I was not mistaken. Your hair is all white. Just think! Twelve years ago! Twelve years! My oldest girl is already ten.'

"I looked at the child. And I recognized in her something of her mother's old charm, but something as yet unformed, something which promised for the future. And life seemed to me as swift as a passing train.

"We had reached Maisons-Laffitte. I kissed my old friend's hand. I had found nothing utter but the most commonplace remarks. I was too much upset to talk.

"At night, alone, at home, I stood in front of the mirror for a long time, a very long time. And I finally remembered what I had been, finally saw in my mind's eye my brown mustache, my black hair and the youthful expression of my face. Now I was old. Farewell!"

A VENDETTA

THE widow of Paolo Saverini lived alone with her son in a poor little house on the outskirts of Bonifacio. The town, built on an outjutting part of the mountain, in places even overhanging the sea, looks across the straits, full of sandbanks, towards the southernmost coast of Sardinia. Beneath it, on the other side and almost surrounding it, is a cleft in the cliff like an immense corridor which serves as a harbor, and along it the little Italian and Sardinian fishing boats come by a circuitous route between precipitous cliffs as far as the first houses, and every two weeks the old, wheezy steamer which makes the trip to Ajaccio.

On the white mountain the houses, massed together, makes an even whiter spot. They look like the nests of wild birds, clinging to this peak, overlooking this terrible passage, where vessels rarely venture. The wind, which blows uninterruptedly, has swept bare the forbidding coast; it drives through the narrow straits and lays waste both sides. The pale streaks of foam, clinging to the black rocks, whose countless peaks rise up out of the water, look like bits of rag floating and drifting on the surface of the sea.

The house of widow Saverini, clinging to the very edge of the precipice, looks out, through its three windows, over this wild and desolate picture.

She lived there alone, with her son Antonia and their dog "Sémillante," a big, thin beast, with a long rough coat, of the sheep-dog breed. The young man took her with him when out hunting.

One night, after some kind of a quarrel, Antoine Saverini was treacherously stabbed by Nicolas Ravolati, who escaped the same evening to Sardinia.

When the old mother received the body of her child, which the neighbors had brought back to her, she did not cry, but she stayed there for a long time motionless, watching him. Then, stretching her wrinkled hand over the body, she promised him a vendetta. She did not wish anybody near her, and she shut herself up beside the body with the dog, which howled continuously, standing at the foot of the bed, her head streached towards her master and her tail between her legs. She did not move any more than did the mother, who, now leaning over the body with a blank stare, was weeping silently and watching it.

The young man, lying on his back, dressed in his jacket of coarse cloth, torn at the chest, seemed to be asleep. But he had blood all over him; on his shirt, which had been torn off in order to administer the first aid; on his vest, on his trousers, on his face, on his hands. Clots of blood had hardened in his beard and in his hair.

His old mother began to talk to him. At the sound of this voice the dog quieted down.

"Never fear, my boy, my little baby, you shall be avenged. Sleep, sleep; you shall be avenged. Do you hear? It's your mother's promise! And she

always keeps her word, your mother does, you know she does."

Slowly she leaned over him, pressing her cold lips to his dead ones.

Then Sémillante began to howl again with a long, monotonous, penetrating, horrible howl.

The two of them, the woman and the dog, remained there until morning.

Antoine Saverini was buried the next day and soon his name ceased to be mentioned in Bonifacio.

He had neither brothers nor cousins. No man was there to carry on the vendetta. His mother, the old woman, alone pondered over it.

On the other side of the straits she saw, from morning until night, a little white speck on the coast. It was the little Sardinian village Longosardo, where Corsican criminals take refuge when they are too closely pursued. They compose almost the entire population of this hamlet, opposite their native island, awaiting the time to return, to go back to the "maquis." She knew that Nicolas Ravolati had sought refuge in this village.

All alone, all day long, seated at her window, she was looking over there and thinking of revenge. How could she do anything without help—she, an invalid and so near death? But she had promised, she had sworn on the body. She could not forget, she could not wait. What could she do? She no longer slept at night; she had neither rest nor peace of mind; she thought persistently. The dog, dozing at her feet, would sometimes lift her head and howl. Since her master's death she often howled thus, as though she were calling him, as though her

beast's soul, inconsolable too, had also retained a recollection that nothing could wipe out.

One night, as Sémillante began to howl, the mother suddenly got hold of an idea, a savage, vindictive, fierce idea. She thought it over until morning. Then, having arisen at daybreak, she went to church. She prayed, prostrate on the floor, begging the Lord to help her, to support her, to give to her poor, broken-down body the strength which she needed in order to avenge her son.

She returned home. In her yard she had an old barrel, which acted as a cistern. She turned it over, emptied it, made it fast to the ground with sticks and stones. Then she chained Sémillante to this improvised kennel and went into the house.

She walked ceaselessly now, her eyes always fixed on the distant coast of Sardinia. He was over there, the murderer.

All day and all night the dog howled. In the morning the old woman brought her some water in a bowl, but nothing more; no soup, no bread.

Another day went by. Sémillante, exhausted, was sleeping. The following day her eyes were shining, her hair on end and she was pulling wildly at her chain.

All this day the old woman gave her nothing to eat. The beast, furious, was barking hoarsely. Another night went by.

Then, at daybreak, Mother Saverini asked a neighbor for some straw. She took the old rags which had formerly been worn by her husband and stuffed them so as to make them look like a human body.

Having planted a stick in the ground, in front of

Sémillante's kennel, she tied to it this dummy, which seemed to be standing up. Then she made a head out of some old rags.

The dog, surprised, was watching this straw man, and was quiet, although famished. Then the old woman went to the store and bought a piece of black sausage. When she got home she started a fire in the yard, near the kennel, and cooked the sausage. Sémillante, frantic, was jumping about, frothing at the mouth, her eyes fixed on the food, the odor of which went right to her stomach.

Then the mother made of the smoking sausage a necktie for the dummy. She tied it very tight around the neck with string, and when she had finished she untied the dog.

With one leap the beast jumped at the dummy's throat, and with her paws on its shoulders she began to tear at it. She would fall back with a piece of food in her mouth, then would jump again, sinking her fangs into the string, and snatching few pieces of meat she would fall back again and once more spring forward. She was tearing up the face with her teeth and the whole neck was in tatters.

The old woman, motionless and silent, was watching eagerly. Then she chained the beast up again, made her fast for two more days and began this strange performance again.

For three months she accustomed her to this battle, to this meal conquered by a fight. She no longer chained her up, but just pointed to the dummy.

She had taught her to tear him up and to devour him without even leaving any traces in her throat.

Then, as a reward, she would give her a piece of sausage.

As soon as she saw the man, Sémillante would begin to tremble. Then she would look up to her mistress, who, lifting her finger, would cry, "Go!" in a shrill tone.

When she thought that the proper time had come, the widow went to confession and, one Sunday morning she partook of communion with an ecstatic fervor. Then, putting on men's clothes and looking like an old tramp, she struck a bargain with a Sardinian fisherman who carried her and her dog to the other side of the straits.

In a bag she had a large piece of sausage. Sémillante had had nothing to eat for two days. The old woman kept letting her smell the food and whetting her appetite.

They got to Longosardo. The Corsican woman walked with a limp. She went to a baker's shop and asked for Nicolas Ravolati. He had taken up his old trade, that of carpenter. He was working alone at the back of his store.

The old woman opened the door and called:

"Hallo, Nicolas!"

He turned around. Then releasing her dog, she cried:

"Go, go! Eat him up! eat him up!"

The maddened animal sprang for his throat. The man stretched out his arms, clasped the dog and rolled to the ground. For a few seconds he squirmed, beating the ground with his feet. Then he stopped moving, while Sémillante dug her fangs into his throat and tore it to ribbons. Two neigh-

bors, seated before their door, remembered perfectly having seen an old beggar come out with a thin, black dog which was eating something that its master was giving him.

At nightfall the old woman was at home again. She slept well that night.

THE CHRISTENING

"WELL, doctor, a little brandy?"

"With pleasure."

The old ship's surgeon, holding out his glass, watched it as it slowly filled with the golden liquid. Then, holding it in front of his eyes, he let the light from the lamp stream through it, smelled it, tasted a few drops and smacked his lips with relish. Then he said:

"Ah! the charming poison! Or rather the seductive murderer, the delightful destroyer of peoples!

"You people do not know it the way I do. You may have read that admirable book entitled *L'Assommoir,* but you have not, as I have, seen alcohol exterminate a whole tribe of savages, a little kingdom of negroes—alcohol calmly unloaded by the barrel by red-bearded English seamen.

"Right near here, in a little village in Brittany near Pont-l'Abbé, I once witnessed a strange and terrible tragedy caused by alcohol. I was sepnding my vacation in a little country house left me by my father. You know this flat coast where the wind whistles day and night, where one sees, standing or prone, these giant rocks which in the olden times were regarded as guardians, and which still retain something majestic and imposing about them. I always expect to see them come to life and start to walk across the country with the slow and ponderous

tread of giants, or to unfold enormous granite wings and fly toward the paradise of the Druids.

"Everywhere is the sea, always ready on the slightest provocation to rise in its anger and shake its foamy mane at those bold enough to brave its wrath.

"And the men who travel on this terrible sea, which, with one motion of its green back, can overturn and swallow up their frail barks—they go out in the little boats, day and night, hardy, weary and drunk. They are often drunk. They have a saying which says: 'When the bottle is full you see the reef, but when it is empty you see it no more.'

"Go into one of their huts; you will never find the father there. If you ask the woman what has become of her husband, she will stretch her arms out over the dark ocean which rumbles and roars along the coast. He remained there one night, when he had had too much to drink; so did her oldest son. She has four more big, strong, fair-haired boys. Soon it will be their time.

"As I said, I was living in a little house near Pont-l'Abbé. I was there alone with my servant, an old sailor, and with a native family which took care of the grounds in my absence. It consisted of three persons, two sisters and a man, who had married one of them, and who attended to the garden.

"A short time before Christmas my gardener's wife presented him with a boy. The husband asked me to stand as god-father. I could hardly deny the request, and so he borrowed ten francs from me for the cost of the christening, as he said.

"The second day of January was chosen as the date of the ceremony. For a week the earth had

been covered by an enormous white carpet of snow, which made this flat, low country seem vast and limitless. The ocean appeared to be black in contrast with this white plain; one could see it rolling, raging and tossing its waves as though wishing to annihilate its pale neighbor, which appeared to be dead, it was so calm, quiet and cold.

"At nine o'clock the father, Kerandec, came to my door with his sister-in-law, the big Kermagan, and the nurse, who carried the infant wrapped up in a blanket. We started for the church. The weather was so cold that it seemed to dry up the skin and crack it open. I was thinking of the poor little creature who was being carried on ahead of us, and I said to myself that this Breton race must surely be of iron, if their children were able, as soon as they were born, to stand such an outing.

"We came to the church, but the door was closed; the priest was late.

"Then the nurse sat down on one of the steps and began to undress the child. At first I thought there must have been some slight accident, but I saw that they were leaving the poor little fellow naked, completely naked, in the icy air. Furious at such imprudence, I protested:

"'Why, you are crazy! You will kill the child!'

"The woman answered quietly: 'Oh, no, sir; he must wait naked before the Lord.'

"The father and the aunt looked on undisturbed. It was the custom. If it were not adhered to misfortune was sure to attend the little one.

"I scolded, threatened and pleaded. I used force to try to cover the frail creature. All was in vain. The nurse ran away from me through the snow, and

the body of the little one turned purple. I was about to leave these brutes when I saw the priest coming across the country, followed by the sexton and a young boy. I ran towards him and gave vent to my indignation. He showed no surprise nor did he quicken his pace in the least. He answered:

"'What can you expect, sir? It's the custom. They all do it, and it's of no use trying to stop them.'

"'But at least hurry up!' I cried.

"He answered: 'But I can't go any faster.'

"He entered the vestry, while we remained outside on the church steps. I was suffering. But what about the poor little creature who was howling from the effects of the biting cold!

"At last the door opened. He went into the church. But the poor child had to remain naked throughout the ceremony. It was interminable. The priest stammered over the Latin words and mispronounced them horribly. He walked slowly and with a ponderous tread. His white surplice chilled my heart. It seemed as though, in the name of a pitiless and barbarous god, he had wrapped himself in another kind of snow in order to torture this little piece of humanity that suffered so from the cold.

"Finally the christening was finished according to the rites and I saw the nurse once more take the frozen, moaning child and wrap it up in the blanket.

"The priest said to me: 'Do you wish to sign the register?'

"Turning to my gardener, I said: "Hurry up and get home quickly so that you can warm that child.' I gave him some advice so as to ward off, if not too late, a bad attack of pneumonia. He promised to

follow my instructions and left with his sister-in-law and the nurse. I followed the priest into the vestry, and when I had signed he demanded five francs for expenses.

"As I had already given the father ten francs, I refused to pay twice. The priest threatened to destroy the paper and to annul the ceremony. I, in turn, threatened him with the district attorney. The dispute was long, and I finally paid five francs.

"As soon as I reached home I went down to Kerandec's to find out whether everything was all right. Neither father, nor sister-in-law, nor nurse had yet returned. The mother, who had remained alone, was in bed, shivering with cold and starving, for she had had nothing to eat since the day before.

" 'Where the deuce can they have gone?' I asked. She answered without surprise or anger, 'They're going to drink something to celebrate.' It was the custom. Then I thought of my ten francs which were to pay the church and would doubtless pay for the alcohol.

"I sent some broth to the mother and ordered a good fire to be built in the room. I was uneasy and furious and promised myself to drive out these brutes, wondering with terror what was going to happen to the poor infant.

"It was already six, and they had not yet returned. I told my servant to wait for them and I went to bed. I soon fell asleep and slept like a top. At daybreak I was awakened by my servant, who was bringing me my hot water.

"As soon as my eyes were open I asked: 'How about Kerandec?'

"The man hesitated and then stammered: 'Oh!

he came back, all right, after midnight, and so drunk that he couldn't walk, and so were Kermagan and the nurse. I guess they must have slept in a ditch, for the little one died and they never even noticed it.'

"I jumped up out of bed, crying:

"'What! The child is dead?'

"'Yes, sir. They brought it back to Mother Kerandec. When she saw it she began to cry, and now they are making her drink to console her.'

"'What's that? They are making her drink!'

"'Yes, sir. I only found it out this morning. As Kerandec had no more brandy or money, he took some wood alcohol, with monsieur gave him for the lamp, and all four of them are now drinking that. The mother is feeling pretty sick now.'

"I had hastily put on some clothes, and seizing a stick, with the intention of applying it to the backs of these human beasts, I hastened towards the gardener's house.

"The mother was raving drunk beside the blue body of her dead baby. Kerandec, the nurse, and the Kermagan woman were snoring on the floor. I had to take care of the mother, who died towards noon."

The old doctor was silent. He took up the brandy-bottle and poured out another glass. He held it up to the lamp, and the light streaming through it imparted to the liquid the amber color of molten topaz. With one gulp he swallowed the treacherous drink.

THE ORPHAN

MADEMOISELLE SOURCE had adopted this boy under very sad circumstances. She was at the time thirty-six years old. Being disfigured through having as a child slipped off her nurse's lap into the fireplace and burned her face shockingly, she had determined not to marry, for she did not want any man to marry her for her money.

A neighbor of hers, left a widow just before her child was born, died in giving birth, without leaving a sou. Mademoiselle Source took the new-born child, put him out to nurse, reared him, sent him to a boarding-school, then brought him home in his fourteenth year, in order to have in her empty house somebody who would love her, who would look after her, and make her old age pleasant.

She had a little country place four leagues from Rennes, and she now dispensed with a servant; her expenses having increased to more than double since this orphan's arrival, her income of three thousand francs was no longer sufficient to support three persons.

She attended to the housekeeping and cooking herself, and sent out the boy on errands, letting him also occupy himself in cultivating the garden. He was gentle, timid, silent, and affectionate. And she experienced a deep happiness, a fresh happiness

when he kissed her without surprise or horror at her disfigurement. He called her "Aunt," and treated her as a mother.

In the evening they both sat down at the fireside, and she made nice little dainties for him. She heated some wine and toasted a slice of bread, and it made a charming little meal before going to bed. She often took him on her knees and covered him with kisses, murmuring tender words in his ear. She called him: "My little flower, my cherub, my adored angel, my divine jewel." He softly accepted her caresses, hiding his head on the old maid's shoulder. Although he was now nearly fifteen, he had remained small and weak, and had a rather sickly appearance.

Sometimes Mademoiselle Source took him to the city, to see two married female relatives of hers, distant cousins, who were living in the suburbs, and who were the only members of her family in existence. The two women had always found fault with her for having adopted this boy, on account of the inheritance; but for all that, they gave her a cordial welcome, having still hopes of getting a share for themselves, a third, no doubt, if what she possessed were only equally divided.

She was happy, very happy, always occupied with her adopted child. She bought books for him to improve his mind, and he became passionately fond of reading.

He no longer climbed on her knee to pet her as he had formerly done; but, instead, would go and sit down in his little chair in the chimney-corner and open a volume. The lamp placed at the edge of the little table above his head shone on his curly hair,

and on a portion of his forehead; he did not move, he did not raise his eyes or make any gesture. He read on, interested, entirely absorbed in the story he was reading.

Seated opposite to him, she would gaze at him earnestly, astonished at his studiousness, often on the point of bursting into tears.

She said to him occasionally: "You will fatigue yourself, my treasure!" hoping that he would raise his head, and come across to embrace her; but he did not even answer her; he had not heard or understood what she was saying; he paid no attention to anything save what he read in those pages.

For two years he devoured an incalculable number of volumes. His character changed.

After this, he asked Mademoiselle Source several times for money, which she gave him. As he always wanted more, she ended by refusing, for she was both methodical and decided, and knew how to act rationally when it was necessary to do so. By dint of entreaties he obtained a large sum from her one night; but when he begged her for more a few days later, she showed herself inflexible, and did not give way to him further, in fact.

He appeared to be satisfied with her decision.

He again became quiet, as he had formerly been, remaining seated for entire hours, without moving, plunged in deep reverie. He now did not even talk to Madame Source, merely answering her remarks with short, formal words. Nevertheless, he was agreeable and attentive in his manner toward her; but he never embraced her now.

She had by this time grown slightly afraid of him when they sat facing one another at night on

opposite sides of the fireplace. She wanted to wake him up, to make him say something, no matter what, that would break this dreadful silence, which was like the darkness of a wood. But he did not appear to listen to her, and she shuddered with the terror of a poor feeble woman when she had spoken to him five or six times successively without being able to get a word out of him.

What was the matter with him? What was going on in that closed-up head? When she had remained thus two or three hours opposite him, she felt as if she were going insane, and longed to rush away and to escape into the open country in order to avoid that mute, eternal companionship and also some vague danger, which she could not define, but of which she had a presentiment.

She frequently wept when she was alone. What was the matter with him? When she expressed a wish, he unmurmuringly carried it into execution. When she wanted anything brought from the city, he immediately went there to procure it. She had no complaint to make of him; no, indeed! And yet . . .

Another year flitted by, and it seemed to her that a fresh change had taken place in the mind of the young man. She perceived it; she felt it; she divined it. How? No matter! She was sure she was not mistaken; but she could not have explained in what manner the unknown thoughts of this strange youth had changed.

It seemed to her that, until now, he had been like a person in a hesitating frame of mind, who had suddenly arrived at a determination. This idea came to her one evening as she met his glance, a

fixed, singular glance which she had not seen in his face before.

Then he commenced to watch her incessantly, and she wished she could hide herself in order to avoid that cold eye riveted on her.

He kept staring at her, evening after evening, for hours together, only averting his eyes when she said, utterly unnerved:

"Do not look at me like that, my child!"

Then he would lower his head.

But the moment her back was turned she once more felt that his eyes were upon her. Wherever she went, he pursued her with his persistent gaze.

Sometimes, when she was walking in her little garden, she suddenly noticed him hidden behind a bush, as if he were lying in wait for her; and, again, when she sat in front of the house mending stockings while he was digging some vegetable bed, he kept continually watching her in a surreptitious manner, as he worked.

It was in vain that she asked him:

"What's the matter with you, my boy? For the last three years, you have become very different. I don't recognize you. Do tell me what ails you, and what you are thinking of."

He invariably replied, in a quiet, weary tone:

"Why, nothing ails me, aunt!"

And when she persisted:

"Ah! my child, answer me, answer me when I speak to you. If you knew what grief you caused me, you would always answer, and you would not look at me that way. Have you any trouble? Tell me! I'll comfort you!"

He went away, with a tired air, murmuring:

"But there is nothing the matter with me, I assure you."

He had not grown much, having always a childish look, although his features were those of a man. They were, however, hard and badly cut. He seemed incomplete, abortive, only half finished, and disquieting as a mystery. He was a self-contained, unapproachable being, in whom there seemed always to be some active, dangerous mental labor going on.

Mademoiselle Source was quite conscious of all this, and she could not sleep at night, so great was her anxiety. Frightful terrors, dreadful nightmares assailed her. She shut herself up in her own room, and barricaded the door, tortured by fear.

What was she afraid of? She could not tell.

She feared everything, the night, the walls, the shadows thrown by the moon on the white curtains of the windows, and, above all, she feared him.

Why?

What had she to fear? Did she know what it was?

She could live this way no longer! She felt certain that a misfortune threatened her, a frightful misfortune.

She set forth secretly one morning, and went into the city to see her relatives. She told them about the matter in a gasping voice. The two women thought she was going mad and tried to reassure her.

She said:

"If you knew the way he looks at me from morning till night. He never takes his eyes off me! At times, I feel a longing to cry for help, to call in the

neighbors, so much am I afraid. But what could I say to them? He does nothing but look at me."

The two female cousins asked:

"Is he ever brutal to you? Does he give you sharp answers?"

She replied:

"No, never; he does everything I wish; he works hard; he is steady; but I am so frightened that I care nothing for that. He is planning something, I am certain of that—quite certain. I don't care to remain all alone like that with him in the country."

The relatives, astonished at her words, declared that people would be amazed, would not understand; and they advised her to keep silent about her fears and her plans, without, however, dissuading her from coming to reside in the city, hoping in that way that the entire inheritance would eventually fall into their hands.

They even promised to assist her in selling her house, and in finding another, near them.

Mademoiselle Source returned home. But her mind was so much upset that she trembled at the slightest noise, and her hands shook whenever any trifling disturbance agitated her.

Twice she went again to consult her relatives, quite determined now not to remain any longer in this way in her lonely dwelling. At last, she found a little cottage in the suburbs, which suited her, and she privately bought it.

The signature of the contract took place on a Tuesday morning, and Mademoiselle Source devoted the rest of the day to the preparations for her change of residence.

At eight o'clock in the evening she got into the

diligence which passed within a few hundred yards of her house, and she told the conductor to put her down in the place where she usually alighted. The man called out to her as he whipped his horses:

"Good evening, Mademoiselle Source — good night!"

She replied as she walked on:

"Good evening, Père Joseph." Next morning, at half-past seven, the postman who conveyed letters to the village noticed at the cross-road, not far from the high road, a large splash of blood not yet dry. He said to himself: "Hallo! some boozer must have had a nose bleed."

But he perceived ten paces farther on a pocket handkerchief also stained with blood. He picked it up. The linen was fine, and the postman, in alarm, made his way over to the ditch, where he fancied he saw a strange object.

Mademoiselle Source was lying at the bottom on the grass, her throat cut with a knife.

An hour later, the gendarmes, the examining magistrate, and other authorities made an inquiry as to the cause of death.

The two female relatives, called as witnesses, told all about the old maid's fears and her last plans.

The orphan was arrested. After the death of the woman who had adopted him, he wept from morning till night, plunged, at least to all appearance, in the most violent grief.

He proved that he had spent the evening up to eleven o'clock in a café. Ten persons had seen him, having remained there till his departure.

The driver of the diligence stated that he had

set down the murdered woman on the road between half-past nine and ten o'clock.

The accused was acquitted. A will, drawn up a long time before, which had been left in the hands of a notary in Rennes, made him sole heir. So he inherited everything.

For a long time, the people of the country boycotted him, as they still suspected him. His house, that of the dead woman, was looked upon as accursed. People avoided him in the street.

But he showed himself so good-natured, so open, so familiar, that gradually these horrible doubts were forgotten. He was generous, obliging, ready to talk to the humblest about anything, as long as they cared to talk to him.

The notary, Maitre Rameau, was one of the first to take his part, attracted by his smiling loquacity. He said at a dinner, at the tax collector's house:

"A man who speaks with such facility and who is always in good humor could not have such a crime on his conscience."

Touched by his argument, the others who were present reflected, and they recalled to mind the long conversations with this man who would almost compel them to stop at the road corners to listen to his ideas, who insisted on their going into his house when they were passing by his garden, who could crack a joke better than the lieutenant of the gendarmes himself, and who possessed such contagious gayety that, in spite of the repugnance with which he inspired them, they could not keep from always laughing in his company.

All doors were opened to him after a time.

He is to-day the mayor of his township.

A DUEL

THE war was over. The Germans occupied France. The whole country was pulsating like a conquered wrestler beneath the knee of his victorious opponent.

The first trains from Paris, distracted, starving, despairing Paris, were making their way to the new frontiers, slowly passing through the country districts and the villages. The passengers gazed through the windows at the ravaged fields and burned hamlets. Prussian soldiers, in their black helmets with brass spikes, were smoking their pipes astride their chairs in front of the houses which were still left standing. Others were working or talking just as if they were members of the families. As you passed through the different towns you saw entire regiments drilling in the squares, and, in spite of the rumble of the carriage-wheels, you could every moment hear the hoarse words of command.

M. Dubuis, who during the entire siege had served as one of the National Guard in Paris, was going to join his wife and daughter, whom he had prudently sent away to Switzerland before the invasion.

Famine and hardship had not diminished his big paunch so characteristic of the rich, peace-loving merchant. He had gone through the terrible events of the past year with sorrowful resignation and bitter complaints at the savagery of men. Now that he was journeying to the frontier at the close of the

war, he saw the Prussians for the first time, although he had done his duty on the ramparts and mounted guard on many a cold night.

He stared with mingled fear and anger at those bearded armed men, installed all over French soil as if they were at home, and he felt in his soul a kind of fever of impotent patriotism, at the same time also the great need of that new instinct of prudence which since then has never left us. In the same railway carriage were two Englishmen, who had come to the country as sightseers and were gazing about them with looks of quiet curiosity. They were both also stout, and kept chatting in their own language, sometimes referring to their guide-book, and reading aloud the names of the places indicated.

Suddenly the train stopped at a little village station, and a Prussian officer jumped up with a great clatter of his sabre on the double footboard of the railway carriage. He was tall, wore a tight-fitting uniform, and had whiskers up to his eyes. His red hair seemed to be on fire, and his long mustache, of a paler hue, stuck out on both sides of his face, which it seemed to cut in two.

The Englishmen at once began staring at him with smiles of newly awakened interest, while M. Dubuis made a show of reading a newspaper. He sat concealed in his corner like a thief in presence of a gendarme.

The train started again. The Englishmen went on chatting and looking out for the exact scene of different battles; and all of a sudden, as one of them stretched out his arm toward the horizon as he pointed out a village, the Prussian officer re-

marked in French, extending his long legs and lolling backward:

"I killed a dozen Frenchmen in that village and took more than a hundred prisoners."

The Englishmen, quite interested, immediately asked:

"Ha! and what is the name of this village?"

The Prussian replied:

"Pharsbourg." He added: "We caught those French scoundrels by the ears."

And he glanced toward M. Dubuis, laughing conceitedly into his mustache.

The train rolled on, still passing through hamlets occupied by the victorious army. German soldiers could be seen along the roads, on the edges of fields, standing in front of gates or chatting outside cafés. They covered the soil like African locusts.

The officer said, with a wave of his hand:

"If I had been in command, I'd have taken Paris, burned everything, killed everybody. No more France!"

The Englishman, through politeness, replied simply:

"Ah! yes."

He went on:

"In twenty years all Europe, all of it, will belong to us. Prussia is more than a match for all of them."

The Englishmen, getting uneasy, no longer replied. Their faces, which had become impassive, seemed made of wax behind their long whiskers. Then the Prussian officer began to laugh. And still, lolling back, he began to sneer. He sneered at the downfall of France, insulted the prostrate enemy;

he sneered at Austria, which had been recently conquered; he sneered at the valiant but fruitless defence of the departments; he sneered at the Garde Mobile and at the useless artillery. He announced that Bismarck was going to build a city of iron with the captured cannon. And suddenly he placed his boots against the thigh of M. Dubuis, who turned away his eyes, reddening to the roots of his hair.

The Englishmen seemed to have become indifferent to all that was going on, as if they were suddenly shut up in their own island, far from the din of the world.

The officer took out his pipe, and looking fixedly at the Frenchman, said:

"You haven't any tobacco—have you?"

M. Dubuis replied:

"No, monsieur."

The German resumed:

"You might go and buy some for me when the train stops."

And he began laughing afresh as he added:

"I'll give you the price of a drink."

The train whistled, and slackened its pace. They passed a station that had been burned down; and then they stopped altogether.

The German opened the carriage door, and, catching M. Dubuis by the arm, said:

"Go and do what I told you—quick, quick!"

A Prussian detachment occupied the station. Other soldiers were standing behind wooden gratings, looking on. The engine was getting up steam before starting off again. Then M. Dubuis hurriedly jumped on the platform, and, in spite of the warnings

of the station master, dashed into the adjoining compartment.

He was alone! He tore open his waistcoat, his heart was beating so rapidly, and, gasping for breath, he wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

The train drew up at another station. And suddenly the officer appeared at the carriage door and jumped in, followed close behind by the two Englishmen, who were impelled by curiosity. The German sat facing the Frenchman, and, laughing still, said:

"You did not want to do what I asked you?"

M. Dubuis replied:

"No, monsieur."

The train had just left the station.

The officer said:

"I'll cut off your mustache to fill my pipe with."

And he put out his hand toward the Frenchman's face.

The Englishmen stared at them, retaining their previous impassive manner.

The German had already pulled out a few hairs, and was still tugging at the mustache, when M. Dubuis, with a back stroke of his hand, flung aside the officer's arm, and, seizing him by the collar, threw him down on the seat. Then, excited to a pitch of fury, his temples swollen and his eyes glaring, he kept throttling the officer with one hand, while with the other clenched he began to strike him violent blows in the face. The Prussian struggled, tried to draw his sword, to clinch with his adversary, who was on top of him. But M. Dubuis crushed him with his enormous weight and kept punching him without taking breath or knowing where his blows fell. Blood flowed down the face of the German,

who, choking and with a rattling in his throat, spat out his broken teeth and vainly strove to shake off this infuriated man who was killing him.

The Englishmen had got on their feet and came closer in order to see better. They remained standing, full of mirth and curiosity, ready to bet for, or against, either combatant.

Suddenly M. Dubuis, exhausted by his violent efforts, rose and resumed his seat without uttering a word.

The Prussian did not attack him, for the savage assault had terrified and astonished the officer as well as causing him suffering. When he was able to breathe freely, he said:

"Unless you give me satisfaction with pistols, I will kill you."

M. Dubuis replied:

"Whenever you like. I'm quite ready."

The German said:

"Here is the town of Strasbourg. I'll get two officers to be my seconds, and there will be time before the train leaves the station."

M. Dubuis, who was puffing as hard as the engine, said to the Englishmen:

"Will you be my seconds?" They both answered together:

"Oh, yes!"

And the train stopped.

In a minute the Prussian had found two comrades, who brought pistols, and they made their way toward the ramparts.

The Englishmen were continually looking at their watches, shuffling their feet and hurrying on with

the preparations, uneasy lest they should be too late for the train.

M. Dubuis had never fired a pistol in his life.

They made him stand twenty paces away from his enemy. He was asked:

"Are you ready?"

While he was answering, "Yes, monsieur," he noticed that one of the Englishmen had opened his umbrella in order to keep off the rays of the sun.

A voice gave the signal:

"Fire!"

M. Dubuis fired at random without delay, and he was amazed to see the Prussian opposite him stagger, lift up his arms and fall forward, dead. He had killed the officer.

One of the Englishmen exclaimed: "Ah!" He was quivering with delight, with satisfied curiosity and joyous impatience. The other, who still kept his watch in his hand, seized M. Dubuis' arm and hurried him in double-quick time toward the station, his fellow-countryman marking time as he ran beside them, with closed fists, his elbows at his sides, "One, two; one, two!"

And all three, running abreast rapidly, made their way to the station like three grotesque figures in a comic newspaper.

The train was on the point of starting. They sprang into their carriage. Then the Englishmen, taking off their travelling caps, waved them three times over their heads, exclaiming:

"Hip! hip! hip! hurrah!"

And gravely, one after the other, they extended their right hands to M. Dubuis and then went back and sat down in their own corner.

BELHOMME'S BEAST

THE coach for Havre was ready to leave Criquetot, and all the passengers were waiting for their names to be called out, in the courtyard of the Commercial Hotel kept by Monsieur Malandain, Jr.

It was a yellow wagon, mounted on wheels which had once been yellow, but were now almost gray through the accumulation of mud. The front wheels were very small, the back ones, high and fragile, carried the large body of the vehicle, which was swollen like the belly of an animal. Three white horses, with enormous heads and great round knees, were the first things one noticed. They were harnessed ready to draw this coach, which had something of the appearance of a monster in its massive structure. The horses seemed already asleep in front of the strange vehicle.

The driver, Césaire Horlaville, a little man with a big paunch, supple nevertheless, through his constant habit of climbing over the wheels to the top of the wagon, his face all aglow from exposure to the brisk air of the plains, to rain and storms, and also from the use of brandy, his eyes twitching from the effect of constant contact with wind and hail, appeared in the doorway of the hotel, wiping his mouth on the back of his hand. Large round baskets, full of frightened poultry, were standing in

front of the peasant women. Césaire Horlaville took them one after the other and packed them on the top of his coach; then, more gently, he loaded on those containing eggs; finally he tossed up from below several little bags of grain, small packages wrapped in handkerchiefs, pieces of cloth, or paper. Then he opened the back door, and drawing a list from his pocket he called:

"Monsieur le curé de Gorgeville."

The priest advanced. He was a large, powerful, robust man with a red face and a genial expression. He hitched up his cassock to lift his foot, just as the women hold up their skirts, and climbed into the coach.

"The schoolmaster of Rollebosc-les-Grinets."

The man hastened forward, tall, timid, wearing a long frock coat which fell to his knees, and he in turn disappeared through the open door.

"Maître Poiret, two seats."

Poiret approached, a tall, round-shouldered man, bent by the plow, emaciated through abstinence, bony, with a skin dried by a sparing use of water. His wife followed him, small and thin, like a tired animal, carrying a large green umbrella in her hands.

"Maître Rabot, two seats."

Rabot hesitated, being of an undecided nature. He asked:

"You mean me?"

The driver was going to answer with a jest, when Rabot dived head first towards the door, pushed forward by a vigorous shove from his wife, a tall, square woman with a large, round stomach like a barrel, and hands as large as hams.

Rabot slipped into the wagon like a rat entering a hole.

"Maître Caniveau."

A large peasant, heavier than an ox, made the springs bend, and was in turn engulfed in the interior of the yellow chest.

"Maître Belhomme."

Belhomme, tall and thin, came forward, his neck bent, his head hanging, a handkerchief held to his ear as if he were suffering from a terrible toothache.

All these people wore the blue blouse over quaint and antique coats of a black or greenish cloth, Sunday clothes which they would only uncover in the streets of Havre. Their heads were covered by silk caps at high as towers, the emblem of supreme elegance in the small villages of Normandy.

Césaire Horlaville closed the door, climbed up on his box and snapped his whip.

The three horses awoke and, tossing their heads, shook their bells.

The driver then yelling "Get up!" as loud as he could, whipped up his horses. They shook themselves, and, with an effort, started off at a slow, halting gait. And behind them came the coach, rattling its shaky windows and iron springs, making a terrible clatter of hardware and glass, while the passengers were tossed hither and thither like so many rubber balls.

At first all kept silent out of respect for the priest, that they might not shock him. Being of a loquacious and genial disposition, he started the conversation.

"Well, Maître Caniveau," said he, "how are you getting along?"

The enormous farmer who, on account of his size, girth and stomach, felt a bond of sympathy for the representative of the Church, answered with a smile:

"Pretty well, Monsieur le curé, pretty well. And how are you?"

"Oh! I'm always well and healthy."

"And you, Maître Poiret?" asked the abbé.

"Oh! I'd be all right only the colzas ain't a-goin' to give much this year, and times are so hard that they are the only things worth while raisin'."

"Well, what can you expect? Times are hard."

"Huh! I should say they were hard," sounded the rather virile voice of Rabot's big consort.

As she was from a neighboring village, the priest only knew her by name.

"Is that you, Blondel?" he said.

"Yes, I'm the one that married Rabot."

Rabot, slender, timid, and self-satisfied, bowed smilingly, bending his head forward as though to say: "Yes, I'm the Rabot whom Blondel married."

Suddenly Maître Belhomme, still holding his handkerchief to his ear, began groaning in a pitiful fashion. He was going "Oh—oh—oh!" and stamping his foot in order to show his terrible suffering.

"You must have an awful toothache," said the priest.

The peasant stopped moaning for a minute and answered:

"No, Monsieur le curé, it is not the teeth. It's my ear—away down at the bottom of my ear."

"Well, what have you got in your ear? A lump of wax?"

"I don't know whether it's wax; but I know that it is a bug, a big bug, that crawled in while I was asleep in the haystack."

'A bug! Are you sure?"

"Am I sure? As sure as I am of heaven, Monsieur le curé! I can feel it gnawing at the bottom of my ear! It's eating my head for sure! It's eating my head! Oh—oh—oh!" And he began to stamp his foot again.

Great interest had been aroused among the spectators. Each one gave his bit of advice. Poiret claimed that it was a spider, the teacher thought it might be a caterpillar. He had already seen such a thing once, at Campemuret, in Orne, where he had been for six years. In this case the caterpillar had gone through the head and out at the nose. But the man remained deaf in that ear ever after, the drum having been pierced.

"It's more likely to be a worm," said the priest.

Maître Belhomme, his head resting against the door, for he had been the last one to enter, was still moaning.

"Oh—oh—oh! I think it must be an ant, a big ant—there it is biting again. Oh, Monsieur le curé, how it hurts! how it hurts!"

"Have you seen the doctor?" asked Caniveau.

"I should say not!"

"Why?"

The fear of the doctor seemed to cure Belhomme. He straightened up without, however, dropping his handkerchief.

"What! You have money for them, for those

loafers? He would have come once, twice, three times, four times, five times! That means two five-franc pieces, two five-franc pieces, for sure. And what would he have done, the loafer, tell me, what would he have done? Can you tell me?"

Caniveau was laughing.

"No, I don't know. Where are you going?"

"I am going to Havre, to see Chambrelan."

"Who is Chambrelan?"

"The healer, of course."

"What healer?"

"The healer who cured my father."

"Your father?"

"Yes, the healer who cured my father years ago."

"What was the matter with your father?"

"A draught caught him in the back, so that he couldn't move hand or foot."

"Well, what did your friend Chambrelan do to him?"

"He kneaded his back with both hands as though he were making bread! And he was all right in a couple of hours!"

Belhomme thought that Chambrelan must also have used some charm, but he did not dare say so before the priest. Caniveau replied, laughing:

"Are you sure it isn't a rabbit that you have in your ear? He might have taken that hole for his home. Wait, I'll make him run away."

Whereupon Caniveau, making a megaphone of his hands, began to mimic the barking of hounds. He snapped, howled, growled, barked. And everybody in the carriage began to roar, even the schoolmaster, who, as a rule, never even smiled.

However, as Belhomme seemed angry at their

making fun of him, the priest changed the conversation and turning to Rabot's big wife, said:

"You have a large family, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes, Monsieur le curé—and it's a pretty hard matter to bring them up!"

Rabot agreed, nodding his head as though to say: "Oh, yes, it's a hard thing to bring up!"

"How many children?"

She replied authoritatively in a strong, clear voice:

"Sixteen children, Monsieur le curé, fifteen of them by my husband!"

And Rabot smiled broadly, nodding his head. He was responsible for fifteen, he alone, Rabot! His wife said so! Therefore there could be no doubt about it. And he was proud!

And whose was the sixteenth? She didn't tell. It was doubtless the first. Perhaps everybody knew, for no one was surprised. Even Caniveau kept mum.

But Belhomme began to moan again:

"Oh—oh—oh! It's scratching about in the bottom of my ear! Oh, dear, oh, dear!"

The coach just then stopped at the Café Polyte. The priest said:

"If someone were to pour a little water into your ear, it might perhaps drive it out. Do you want to try?"

"Sure! I am willing."

And everybody got out in order to witness the operation. The priest asked for a bowl, a napkin and a glass of water, then he told the teacher to hold the patient's head over on one side, and, as

soon as the liquid should have entered the ear, to turn his head over suddenly on the other side.

But Caniveau, who was already peering into Belhomme's ear to see if he couldn't discover the beast, shouted:

"Gosh! What a mess! You'll have to clear that out, old man. Your rabbit could never get through that; his feet would stick."

The priest in turn examined the passage and saw that it was too narrow and too congested for him to attempt to expel the animal. It was the teacher who cleared out this passage by means of a match and a bit of cloth. Then, in the midst of the general excitement, the priest poured into the passage half a glass of water, which trickled over the face through the hair and down the neck of the patient. Then the schoolmaster quickly twisted the head round over the bowl, as though he were trying to unscrew it. A couple of drops dripped into the white bowl. All the passengers rushed forward. No insect had come out.

However, Belhomme exclaimed: "I don't feel anything any more." The priest triumphantly exclaimed: "Certainly it has been drowned." Everybody was happy and got back into the coach.

But hardly had they started when Belhomme began to cry out again. The bug had aroused itself and had become furious. He even declared that it had now entered his head and was eating his brain. He was howling with such contortions that Poirat's wife, thinking him possessed by the devil, began to cry and to cross herself. Then, the pain abating a little, the sick man began to tell how it was running round in his ear. With his finger he imitated the

"Celeste, suddenly pale, quickly stepped forward and forcibly poured a spoonful down the child's open mouth."

—The Child, p. 4.

movements of the body, seeming to see it, to follow it with his eyes: "There is goes up again! Oh—oh—oh—what torture!"

Caniveau was getting impatient. "It's the water that is making the bug angry. It is probably more accustomed to wine."

Everybody laughed, and he continued: "When we get to the Café Bourbeux, give it some brandy, and it won't bother you any more, I wager."

But Belhomme could contain himself no longer; he began howling as though his soul were being torn from his body. The priest was obliged to hold his head for him. They asked Césaire Horlaville to stop at the nearest house. It was a farmhouse at the side of the road. Belhomme was carried into it and laid on the kitchen table in order to repeat the operation. Caniveau advised mixing brandy and water in order to benumb and perhaps kill the insect. But the priest preferred vinegar.

They poured the liquid in drop by drop this time, that it might penetrate down to the bottom, and they left it several minutes in the organ that the beast had chosen for its home.

A bowl had once more been brought; Belhomme was turned over bodily by the priest and Caniveau, while the schoolmaster was tapping on the healthy ear in order to empty the other.

Césaire Horlaville himself, whip in hand, had come in to observe the proceedings.

Suddenly, at the bottom of the bowl appeared a little brown spot, no bigger than a tiny seed. However, it was moving. It was a flea! First there were cries of astonishment and then shouts of laughter. A flea! Well, that was a good joke, a

mighty good one! Caniveau was slapping his thigh, Césaire Horlaville snapped his whip, the priest laughed like a braying donkey, the teacher cackled as though he were sneezing, and the two women were giving little screams of joy, like the clucking of hens.

Belhomme had seated himself on the table and had taken the bowl between his knees; he was observing, with serious attention and a vengeful anger in his eye, the conquered insect which was twisting round in the water. He grunted, "You rotten little beast!" and he spat on it.

The driver, wild with joy, kept repeating: "A flea, a flea, ah! there you are, damned little flea, damned little flea, damned little flea!" Then having calmed down a little, he cried: "Well, back to the coach! We've lost enough time."

THE DOWRY

THE marriage of Maitre Simon Lebrument with Mademoiselle Jeanne Cordier was a surprise to no one. Maitre Lebrument had bought out the practice of Maitre Papillon; naturally, he had to have money to pay for it; and Mademoiselle Jeanne Cordier had three hundred thousand francs clear in currency, and in bonds payable to bearer.

Maitre Lebrument was a handsome man. He was stylish, although in a provincial way; but, nevertheless, he was stylish—a rare thing at Boutigny-le-Rebours.

Mademoiselle Cordier was graceful and fresh-looking, although a trifle awkward; nevertheless, she was a handsome girl, and one to be desired.

The marriage ceremony turned all Boutigny topsy-turvy. Everybody admired the young couple, who quickly returned home to domestic felicity, having decided simply to take a short trip to Paris, after a few days of retirement.

This tête-à-tête was delightful, Maitre Lebrument having shown just the proper amount of delicacy. He had taken as his motto: "Everything comes to him who waits." He knew how to be at the same time patient and energetic. His success was rapid and complete.

After four days, Madame Lebrument adored her

husband. She could not get along without him. She would sit on his knees, and taking him by the ears she would say: "Open your mouth and shut your eyes." He would open his mouth wide and partly close his eyes, and he would try to nip her fingers as she slipped some dainty between his teeth. Then she would give him a kiss, sweet and long, which would make chills run up and down his spine. And then, in his turn, he would not have enough caresses to please his wife from morning to night and from night to morning.

When the first week was over, he said to his young companion:

"If you wish, we will leave for Paris next Tuesday. We will be like two lovers, we will go to the restaurants, the theatres, the concert halls, everywhere, everywhere!"

She was ready to dance for joy.

"Oh! yes, yes. Let us go as soon as possible."

He continued:

"And then, as we must forget nothing, ask your father to have your dowry ready; I shall pay Maitre Papillon on this trip."

She answered:

"All right! I will tell him to-morrow morning."

And he took her in his arms once more, to renew those sweet games of love which she had so enjoyed for the past week.

The following Tuesday, father-in-law and mother-in-law went to the station with their daughter and their son-in-law who were leaving for the capital.

The father-in-law said:

"I tell you it is very imprudent to carry so much money about in a pocketbook." And the young lawyer smiled.

"Don't worry; I am accustomed to such things. You understand that, in my profession, I sometimes have as much as a million about me. In this manner, at least, we avoid a great amount of red tape and delay. You needn't worry."

The conductor was crying:

"All aboard for Paris!"

They scrambled into a car, where two old ladies were already seated.

Lebrument whispered into his wife's ear:

"What a bother! I won't be able to smoke."

She answered in a low voice:

"It annoys me too, but not on account of your cigar."

The whistle blew and the train started. The trip lasted about an hour, during which time they did not say very much to each other, as the two old ladies did not go to sleep.

As soon as they were in front of the Saint-Lazare Station, Maitre Lebrument said to his wife:

"Dearie, let us first go over to the Boulevard and get something to eat; then we can quietly return and get our trunk and bring it to the hotel."

She immediately assented.

"Oh! yes. Let's eat at the restaurant. Is it far?"

He answered:

"Yes, it's quite a distance, but we will take the omnibus."

She was surprised:

"Why don't we take a cab?"

He began to scold her smilingly:

"Is that the way you save money? A cab for a five minutes' ride at six cents a minute! You would deprive yourself of nothing."

"That's so," she said, a little embarrassed.

A big omnibus was passing by, drawn by three big horses, which were trotting along. Lebrument called out:

"Conductor! Conductor!"

The heavy carriage stopped. And the young lawyer, pushing his wife, said to her quickly:

"Go inside; I'm going up on top, so that I may smoke at least one cigarette before lunch."

She had no time to answer. The conductor, who had seized her by the arm to help her up the step, pushed her inside, and she fell into a seat, bewildered, looking through the back window at the feet of her husband as he climbed up to the top of the vehicle.

And she sat there motionless, between a fat man who smelled of cheap tobacco and an old woman who smelled of garlic.

All the other passengers were lined up in silence —a grocer's boy, a young girl, a soldier, a gentleman with gold-rimmed spectacles and a big silk hat, two ladies with a self-satisfied and crabbed look, which seemed to say: "We are riding in this thing, but we don't *have* to," two sisters of charity and an undertaker. They looked like a collection of caricatures.

The jolting of the wagon made them wag their heads and the shaking of the wheels seemed to stupefy them—they all looked as though they were asleep.

The young woman remained motionless.

"Why didn't he come inside with me?" she was saying to herself. An unaccountable sadness seemed to be hanging over her. He really need not have acted so.

The sisters motioned to the conductor to stop, and they got off one after the other, leaving in their wake the pungent smell of camphor. The bus started up and soon stopped again. And in got a cook, red-faced and out of breath. She sat down and placed her basket of provisions on her knees. A strong odor of dish-water filled the vehicle.

"It's further than I imagined," thought Jeanne.

The undertaker went out, and was replaced by a coachman who seemed to bring the atmosphere of the stable with him. The young girl had as a successor a messenger, the odor of whose feet showed that he was continually walking.

The lawyer's wife began to feel ill at ease, nauseated, ready to cry without knowing why.

Other persons left and others entered. The stage went on through interminable streets, stopping at stations and starting again.

"How far it is!" thought Jeanne. "I hope he hasn't gone to sleep! He has been so tired the last few days."

Little by little all the passengers left. She was left alone, all alone. The conductor cried:

"Vaugirard!"

Seeing that she did not move, he repeated:

"Vaugirard!"

She looked at him, understanding that he was speaking to her, as there was no one else there. For the third time the man said:

"Vaugirard!"

Then she asked:

"Where are we?"

He answered gruffly:

"We're at Vaugirard, of course! I have been yelling it for the last half hour!"

"Is it far from the Boulevard?" she said.

"Which boulevard?"

"The Boulevard des Italiens."

"We passed that a long time ago!"

"Would you mind telling my husband?"

"Your husband! Where is he?"

"On the top of the bus."

"On the top! There hasn't been anybody there for a long time."

She started, terrified.

"What? That's impossible! He got on with me. Look well! He must be there."

The conductor was becoming uncivil:

"Come on, little one, you've talked enough! You can find ten men for every one that you lose. Now run along. You'll find another one somewhere."

Tears were coming to her eyes. She insisted:

"But, monsieur, you are mistaken; I assure you that you must be mistaken. He had a big portfolio under his arm."

The man began to laugh:

"A big portfolio! Oh, yes! He got off at the Madeleine. He got rid of you, all right! Ha! ha! ha!"

The stage had stopped. She got out and, in spite of herself, she looked up instinctively to the roof of the bus. It was absolutely deserted.

Then she began to cry, and, without thinking that

anybody was listening or watching her, she said out loud:

"What is going to become of me?"

An inspector approached:

"What's the matter?"

The conductor answered, in a bantering tone of voice:

"It's a lady who got left by her husband during the trip."

The other continued:

"Oh! that's nothing. You go about your business."

Then he turned on his heels and walked away.

She began to walk straight ahead, too bewildered, too crazed even to understand what had happened to her. Where was she to go? What could she do? What could have happened to him? How could he have made such a mistake? How could he have been so forgetful?

She had two francs in her pocket. To whom could she go? Suddenly she remembered her cousin Barral, one of the assistants in the offices of the Ministry of the Navy.

She had just enough to pay for a cab. She drove to his house. He met her just as he was leaving for his office. He was carrying a large portfolio under his arm, just like Lebrument.

She jumped out of the carriage.

"Henry!" she cried.

He stopped, astonished:

"Jeanne! Here—all alone! What are you doing? Where have you come from?"

Her eyes full of tears, she stammered:

"My husband has just got lost!"

"Lost! Where?"

"On an omnibus."

"On an omnibus?"

Weeping, she told him her whole adventure.

He listened, thought, and then asked:

"Was his mind clear this morning?"

"Yes."

"Good. Did he have much money with him?"

"Yes, he was carrying my dowry."

"Your dowry! The whole of it?"

"The whole of it—in order to pay for the practice which he bought."

"Well, my dear cousin, by this time your husband must be well on his way to Belgium."

She could not understand. She kept repeating:

"My husband—you say——"

"I say that he has disappeared with your—your capital—that's all!"

She stood there, a prey to conflicting emotions, sobbing.

"Then he is—he is—he is a villain!"

And, faint from excitement, she leaned her head on her cousin's shoulder and wept.

As people were stopping to look at them, he pushed her gently into the vestibule of his house, and, supporting her with his arm around her waist, he led her up the stairs, and as his astonished servant opened the door, he ordered:

"Sophie, run to the restaurant and get a luncheon for two. I am not going to the office to-day."

THE CHILD

LEMONNIER had remained a widower with one child. He had loved his wife devotedly, with a tender and exalted love, without a slip, during their entire married life. He was a good, honest man, perfectly simple, sincere, without suspicion or malice.

He fell in love with a poor neighbor, proposed and was accepted. He was making a very comfortable living out of the wholesale cloth business, and he did not for a minute suspect that the young girl might have accepted him for anything else but himself.

She made him happy. She was everything to him; he only thought of her, looked at her continually, with worshiping eyes. During meals he would make any number of blunders, in order not to have to take his eyes from the beloved face; he would pour the wine in his plate and the water in the salt-cellar, then he would laugh like a child, repeating:

"You see, I love you too much; that makes me crazy."

She would smile with a calm and resigned look; then she would look away, as though embarrassed by the adoration of her husband, and try to make him talk about something else; but he would take

her hand under the table and he would hold it in his, whispering:

"My little Jeanne, my darling little Jeanne!"

She sometimes lost patience and said:

"Come, come, be reasonable; eat and let me eat."

He would sigh and break off a mouthful of bread, which he would then chew slowly.

For five years they had no children. Then suddenly she announced to him that this state of affairs would soon cease. He was wild with joy. He no longer left her for a minute, until his old nurse, who had brought him up and who often ruled the house, would push him out and close the door behind him, in order to compel him to go out in the fresh air.

He had grown very intimate with a young man who had known his wife since childhood, and who was one of the prefect's secretaries. M. Duretour would dine three times a week with the Lemonniers, bringing flowers to madame, and sometimes a box at the theater; and often, at the end of the dinner, Lemonnier, growing tender, turning towards his wife, would explain: "With a companion like you and a friend like him, a man is completely happy on earth."

She died in childbirth. The shock almost killed him. But the sight of the child, a poor, moaning little creature, gave him courage.

He loved it with a passionate and sorrowful love, with a morbid love in which stuck the memory of death, but in which lived something of his worship for the dead mother. It was the flesh of his wife, her being continued, a sort of quintessence of herself. This child was her very life transferred to another body; she had disappeared that it might

exist, and the father would smother it in with kisses. But also, this child had killed her; he had stolen this beloved creature, his life was at the cost of hers. And M. Lemonnier would place his son in the cradle and would sit down and watch him. He would sit this way by the hour, looking at him, dreaming of thousands of things, sweet or sad. Then, when the little one was asleep, he would bend over him and sob.

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The child grew. The father could no longer spend an hour away from him; he would stay near him, take him out for walks, and himself dress him, wash him, make him eat. His friend, M. Duretour, also seemed to love the boy; he would kiss him wildly, in those frenzies of tenderness which are characteristic of parents. He would toss him in his arms, he would trot him on his knees, by the hour, and M. Lemonnier, delighted, would mutter:

"Isn't he a darling? Isn't he a darling?"

And M. Duretour would hug the child in his arms and tickle his neck with his mustache.

Céleste, the old nurse, alone, seemed to have no tenderness for the little one. She would grow angry at his pranks, and seemed impatient at the caresses of the two men. She would exclaim:

"How can you expect to bring a child up like that? You'll make a perfect monkey out of him."

Years went by, and Jean was nine years old. He hardly knew how to read; he had been so spoiled, and only did as he saw fit. He was willful, stubborn and quick-tempered. The father always gave in to him and let him have his own way. M. Duretour would always buy him all the toys he wished,

and he fed him on cake and candies. Then Céleste would grow angry and exclaim:

"It's a shame, monsieur, a shame. You are spoiling this child. But it will have to stop; yes, sir, I tell you it will have to stop, and before long, too."

M. Lemonnier would answer, smiling:

"What can you expect? I love him too much, I can't resist him; you must get used to it."

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Jean was delicate, rather. The doctor said that he was anæmic, prescribed iron, rare meat and broth.

But the little fellow loved only cake and refused all other nourishment; and the father, in despair, stuffed him with cream-puffs and chocolate éclairs.

One evening, as they were sitting down to supper, Céleste brought on the soup with an air of authority and an assurance which she did not usually have. She took off the cover and, dipping the ladle into the dish, she declared:

"Here is some broth such as I have never made; the young one will have to take some this time."

M. Lemonnier, frightened, bent his head. He saw a storm brewing.

Céleste took his plate, filled it herself and placed it in front of him.

He tasted the soup and said:

"It is, indeed, excellent."

The servant took the boy's plate and poured a spoonful of soup in it. Then she retreated a few steps and waited.

Jean smelled the food and pushed his plate away with an expression of disgust. Céleste, suddenly

pale, quickly stepped forward and forcibly poured a spoonful down the child's open mouth.

He choked, coughed, sneezed, spat; howling, he seized his glass and threw it at his nurse. She received it full in the stomach. Then, exasperated, she took the young shaver's head under her arm and began pouring spoonful after spoonful of soup down his throat. He grew as red as a beet, and he would cough it up, stamping, twisting, choking, beating the air with his hands.

At first the father was so surprised that he could not move. Then, suddenly, he rushed forward, wild with rage, seized the servant by the throat and threw her up against the wall stammering:

"Out! Out! Out! you brute!"

But she shook him off, and, her hair streaming down her back, her eyes snapping, she cried out:

"What's gettin' hold of you? You're trying to thrash me because I am making this child eat soup when you are filling him with sweet stuff!"

He kept repeating, trembling from head to foot:

"Out! Get out—get out, you brute!"

Then, wild, she turned to him and, pushing her face up against his, her voice trembling:

"Ah!—you think—you think that you can treat me like that? Oh! no. And for whom?—for that brat who is not even yours. No, not yours! No, not yours—not yours! Everybody knows it, except yourself! Ask the grocer, the butcher, the baker, all of them, any one of them!"

She was growling and mumbling, choked with passion; then she stopped and looked at him.

He was motionless livid, his arms hanging by his

sides. After a short pause, he murmured in a faint, shaky voice, instinct with deep feeling:

"You say? you say? What do you say?"

She remained silent, frightened by his appearance. Once more he stepped forward, repeating:

"You say—what do you say?"

Then in a calm voice, she answered:

"I say what I know, what everybody knows."

He seized her and, with the fury of a beast, he tried to throw her down. But, although old, she was strong and nimble. She slipped under his arm, and running around the table once more furious, she screamed:

"Look at him, just look at him, fool that you are! Isn't he the living image of M. Durefour? Just look at his nose and his eyes! Are yours like that? And his hair! Is it like his mother's? I tell you that everyone knows it, everyone except yourself! It's the joke of the town! Look at him——!"

She went to the door, opened it, and disappeared.

Jean, frightened, sat motionless before his plate of soup.

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At the end of an hour, she returned gently, to see how matters stood. The child, after doing away with all the cakes and a pitcher full of cream and one of syrup, was now emptying the jam-pot with his soup-spoon.

The father had gone out.

Céleste took the child, kissed him, and gently carried him to his room and put him to bed. She came back to the dining-room, cleared the table, put everything in place, feeling very uneasy all the time.

Not a single sound could be heard throughout the

house. She put her ear against's her master's door. He seemed to be perfectly still. She put her eye to the keyhole. He was writing, and seemed very calm.

Then she returned to the kitchen and sat down, ready for any emergency. She slept on a chair and awoke at daylight.

She did the rooms as she had been accustomed to every morning; she swept and dusted, and, towards eight o'clock, prepared M. Lemonnier's breakfast.

But she did not dare bring it to her master, knowing too well how she would be received; she waited for him to ring. But he did not ring. Nine o'clock, then ten o'clock went by.

Céleste, not knowing what to think, prepared her tray and started up with it, her heart beating fast.

She stopped before the door and listened. Everything was still. She knocked; no answer. Then, gathering up all her courage, she opened the door and entered. With a wild shriek, she dropped the breakfast tray which she had been holding in her hand.

In the middle of the room, M. Lemonnier was hanging by a rope from a ring in the ceiling. His tongue was sticking out horribly. His right slipper was lying on the ground, his left one still on his foot. An upturned chair had rolled over to the bed.

Céleste, dazed, ran away shrieking. All the neighbors crowded together. The physician declared that he had died at about midnight.

A letter addressed to M. Duretour was found on the table of the suicide. It contained these words:

"I leave and entrust the child to you!"

A COUNTRY EXCURSION

FOR five months they had been talking of going to take luncheon in one of the country suburbs of Paris on Madame Dufour's birthday, and as they were looking forward very impatiently to the outing, they rose very early that morning. Monsieur Dufour had borrowed the milkman's wagon and drove himself. It was a very tidy, two-wheeled conveyance, with a cover supported by four iron rods, with curtains that had been drawn up, except the one at the back, which floated out like a sail. Madame Dufour, resplendent in a wonderful, cherry-colored silk dress, sat by the side of her husband.

The old grandmother and a girl sat behind them on two chairs, and a boy with yellow hair was lying at the bottom of the wagon, with nothing to be seen of him except his head.

When they reached the bridge of Neuilly, Monsieur Dufour said: "Here we are in the country at last!" and at that signal his wife grew sentimental about the beauties of nature. When they got to the crossroads at Courbevoie they were seized with admiration for the distant landscape. On the right was Argenteuil with its bell tower, and above it rose the hills of Sannois and the mill of Orgemont, while on the left the aqueduct of Marly stood out against the clear morning sky, and in the distance they could see the terrace of Saint-Germain;

and opposite them, at the end of a low chain of hills, the new fort of Cormeilles. Quite in the distance, a very long way off, beyond the plains and village, one could see the sombre green of the forests.

The sun was beginning to burn their faces, the dust got into their eyes, and on either side of the road there stretched an interminable tract of bare, ugly country with an unpleasant odor. One might have thought that it had been ravaged by a pestilence, which had even attacked the buildings, for skeletons of dilapidated and deserted houses, or small cottages, which were left in an unfinished state, because the contractors had not been paid, reared their four roofless walls on each side.

Here and there tall factory chimneys rose up from the barren soil. The only vegetation on that putrid land, where the spring breezes wafted an odor of petroleum and slate, blended with another odor that was even less agreeable. At last, however, they crossed the Seine a second time, and the bridge was a delight. The river sparkled in the sun, and they had a feeling of quiet enjoyment, felt refreshed as they drank in the purer air that was not impregnated by the black smoke of factories nor by the miasma from the deposits of night soil. A man whom they met told them that the name of the place was Bézons. Monsieur Dufour pulled up and read the attractive announcement outside an eating house: *Restaurant Poulin, matelottes and fried fish, private rooms, arbors, and swings.*

"Well, Madame Dufour, will this suit you? Will you make up your mind at last?"

She read the announcement in her turn and then looked at the house for some time.

It was a white country inn, built by the roadside, and through the open door she could see the bright zinc of the counter, at which sat two workmen in their Sunday clothes. At last she made up her mind and said:

"Yes, this will do; and, besides, there is a view."

They drove into a large field behind the inn, separated from the river by the towing path, and dismounted. The husband sprang out first and then held out his arms for his wife, and as the step was very high, Madame Dufour, in order to reach him, had to show the lower part of her limbs, whose former slenderness had disappeared in fat, and Monsieur Dufour, who was already getting excited by the country air, pinched her calf, and then, taking her in his arms, he set her on the ground, as if she had been some enormous bundle. She shook the dust out of the silk dress and then looked round to see in what sort of a place she was.

She was a stout woman, of about thirty-six, full-blown, and delightful to look at. She could hardly breathe, as her corsets were laced too tightly, and their pressure forced her superabundant bosom up to her double chin. Next the girl placed her hand on her father's shoulder and jumped down lightly. The boy with the yellow hair had got down by stepping on the wheel, and he helped Monsieur Dufour to lift his grandmother out. Then they unharnessed the horse, which they had tied to a tree, and the carriage fell back, with both shafts in the air. The men took off their coats and washed their hands in a pail of water and then went and joined the ladies, who had already taken possession of the swings.

A COUNTRY EXCURSION

Mademoiselle Dufour was trying to swing herself standing up, but she could not succeed in getting a start. She was a pretty girl of about eighteen, one of those women who suddenly excite your desire when you meet them in the street and who leave you with a vague feeling of uneasiness and of excited senses. She was tall, had a small waist and large hips, with a dark skin, very large eyes and very black hair. Her dress clearly marked the outlines of her firm, full figure, which was accentuated by the motion of her hips as she tried to swing herself higher. Her arms were stretched upward to hold the rope, so that her bosom rose at every movement she made. Her hat, which a gust of wind had blown off, was hanging behind her, and as the swing gradually rose higher and higher, she showed her delicate limbs up to the knees each time, and the breeze from her flying skirts, which was more heady than the fumes of wine, blew into the faces of the two men, who were looking at her and smiling.

Sitting in the other swing, Madame Dufour kept saying in a monotonous voice:

"Cyprian, come and swing me; do come and swing me, Cyprian!"

At last he went, and turning up his shirt sleeves, as if undertaking a hard piece of work, with much difficulty he set his wife in motion. She clutched the two ropes and held her legs out straight, so as not to touch the ground. She enjoyed feeling dizzy at the motion of the swing, and her whole figure shook like a jelly on a dish, but as she went higher and higher, she became too giddy and was frightened. Each time the swing came down she uttered a piercing scream, which made all the little urchins

in the neighborhood come round, and down below, beneath the garden hedge, she vaguely saw a row of mischievous heads making various grimaces as they laughed.

When a servant girl came out they ordered luncheon.

"Some fried fish, a rabbit sauté, salad and dessert," Madame Dufour said, with an important air.

"Bring two quarts of beer and a bottle of claret," her husband said.

"We will have lunch on the grass," the girl added.

The grandmother, who had an affection for cats, had been running after one that belonged to the house, trying to coax it to come to her for the last ten minutes. The animal, who was no doubt secretly flattered by her attentions, kept close to the good woman, but just out of reach of her hand, and quietly walked round the trees, against which she rubbed herself, with her tail up, purring with pleasure.

"Hello!" suddenly exclaimed the young man with the yellow hair, who was wandering about. "Here are two swell boats!" They all went to look at them and saw two beautiful canoes in a wooden shed; they were as beautifully finished as if they had been ornamental furniture. They hung side by side, like two tall, slender girls, in their narrow shining length, and made one wish to float in them on warm summer mornings and evenings along the flower-covered banks of the river, where the trees dip their branches into the water, where the rushes are continually rustling in the breeze and where the swift kingfishers dart about like flashes of blue lightning.

The whole family looked at them with great respect.

"Oh, they are indeed swell boats!" Monsieur Dufour repeated gravely, as he examined them like a connoiseur. He had been in the habit of rowing in his younger days, he said, and when he had that in his hands—and he went through the action of pulling the oars—he did not care a fig for anybody. He had beaten more than one Englishman formerly at the Joinville regattas. He grew quite excited at last and offered to make a bet that in a boat like that he could row six leagues an hour without exerting himself.

"Luncheon is ready," the waitress said, appearing at the entrance to the boathouse, and they all hurried off. But two young men had taken the very seats that Madame Dufour had selected and were eating their luncheon. No doubt they were the owners of the sculls, for they were in boating costume. They were stretched out, almost lying on the chairs; they were sun-browned and their thin cotton jerseys, with short sleeves, showed their bare arms, which were as strong as a blacksmith's. They were two strong, athletic fellows, who showed in all their movements that elasticity and grace of limb which can only be acquired by exercise and which is so different to the deformity with which monotonous heavy work stamps the mechanic.

They exchanged a rapid smile when they saw the mother and then a glance on seeing the daughter.

"Let us give up our place," one of them said; "it will make us acquainted with them."

The other got up immediately, and holding his black and red boating cap in his hand, he politely

offered the ladies the only shady place in the garden. With many excuses they accepted, and that it might be more rural, they sat on the grass, without either tables or chairs.

The two young men took their plates, knives, forks, etc., to a table a little way off and began to eat again, and their bare arms, which they showed continually, rather embarrassed the girl. She even pretended to turn her head aside and not to see them, while Madame Dufour, who was rather bolder, tempted by feminine curiosity, looked at them every moment, and, no doubt, compared them with the secret unsightliness of her husband. She had squatted herself on ground, with her legs tucked under her, after the manner of tailors, and she kept moving about restlessly, saying that ants were crawling about her somewhere. Monsieur Dufour, annoyed at the presence of the polite strangers, was trying to find a comfortable position, which he did not, however, succeed in doing, and the young man with the yellow hair was eating as silently as an ogre.

"It is lovely weather, monsieur," the stout lady said to one of the boating men. She wished to be friendly because they had given up their place.

"It is, indeed, madame," he replied. "Do you often go into the country?"

"Oh, only once or twice a year to get a little fresh air. And you, monsieur?"

"I come and sleep here every night."

"Oh, that must be very nice!"

"Certainly it is, madame." And he gave them such a practical account of his daily life that it awakened afresh in the hearts of these shopkeepers, who were deprived of the meadows and who longed

for country walks, to that foolish love of nature which they all feel so strongly the whole year round behind the counter in their shop.

The girl raised her eyes and looked at the oarsman with emotion and Monsieur Dufour spoke for the first time.

"It is indeed a happy life," he said. And then he added: "A little more rabbit, my dear?"

"No, thank you," she replied, and turning to the young men again, and pointing to their arms, asked: "Do you never feel cold like that?"

They both began to laugh, and they astonished the family with an account of the enormous fatigue they could endure, of their bathing while in a state of tremendous perspiration, of their rowing in the fog at night; and they struck their chests violently to show how hollow they sounded.

"Ah! You look very strong," said the husband, who did not talk any more of the time when he used to beat the English. The girl was looking at them sideways now, and the young fellow with the yellow hair, who had swallowed some wine the wrong way, was coughing violently and bespattering Madame Dufour's cherry-colored silk dress. She got angry and sent for some water to wash the spots.

Meanwhile it had grown unbearably hot, the sparkling river looked like a blaze of fire and the fumes of the wine were getting into their heads. Monsieur Dufour, who had a violent hiccough, had unbuttoned his waistcoat and the top button of his trousers, while his wife, who felt choking, was gradually unfastening her dress. The apprentice was shaking his yellow wig in a happy frame of mind, and kept helping himself to wine, and the old grand-

mother, feeling the effects of the wine, was very stiff and dignified. As for the girl, one noticed only a peculiar brightness in her eyes, while the brown cheeks became more rosy.

The coffee finished, they suggested singing, and each of them sang or repeated a couplet, which the others applauded frantically. Then they got up with some difficulty, and while the two women, who were rather dizzy, were trying to get a breath of air, the two men, who were altogether drunk, were attempting gymnastics. Heavy, limp and with scarlet faces they hung on awkwardly to the iron rings, without being able to raise themselves.

Meanwhile the two boating men had got their boats into the water, and they came back and politely asked the ladies whether they would like a row.

"Would you like one, Monsieur Dufour?" his wife exclaimed. "Please come!"

He merely gave her a drunken nod, without understanding what she said. Then one of the rowers came up with two fishing rods in his hands, and the hope of catching a gudgeon, that great vision of the Parisian shopkeeper, made Dufour's dull eyes gleam, and he politely allowed them to do whatever they liked, while he sat in the shade under the bridge, with his feet dangling over the river, by the side of the young man with the yellow hair, who was sleeping soundly.

One of the boating men made a martyr of himself and took the mother.

"Let us go to the little wood on the Ile aux Anglais!" he called out as he rowed off. The other boat went more slowly, for the rower was looking

at his companion so intently that he thought of nothing else, and his emotion seemed to paralyze his strength, while the girl, who was sitting in the bow, gave herself up to the enjoyment of being on the water. She felt a disinclination to think, a lassitude in her limbs and a total enervation, as if she were intoxicated, and her face was flushed and her breathing quickened. The effects of the wine, which were increased by the extreme heat, made all the trees on the bank seem to bow as she passed. A vague wish for enjoyment and a fermentation of her blood seemed to pervade her whole body, which was excited by the heat of the day, and she was also disturbed at this tête-à-tête on the water, in a place which seemed depopulated by the heat, with this young man who thought her pretty, whose ardent looks seemed to caress her skin and were as penetrating and pervading as the sun's rays.

Their inability to speak increased their emotion, and they looked about them. At last, however, he made an effort and asked her name.

"Henriette," she said.

"Why, my name is Henri," he replied. The sound of their voices had calmed them, and they looked at the banks. The other boat had passed them and seemed to be waiting for them, and the rower called out:

"We will meet you in the wood; we are going as far as Robinson's, because Madame Dufour is thirsty." Then he bent over his oars again and rowed off so quickly that he was soon out of sight.

Meanwhile a continual roar, which they had heard for some time, came nearer, and the river itself

seemed to shiver, as if the dull noise were rising from its depths.

"What is that noise?" she asked. It was the noise of the weir which cut the river in two at the island, and he was explaining it to her, when, above the noise of the waterfall, they heard the song of a bird, which seemed a long way off.

"Listen!" he said; "the nightingales are singing during the day, so the female birds must be sitting."

A nightingale! She had never heard one before, and the idea of listening to one roused visions of poetic tenderness in her heart. A nightingale! That is to say, the invisible witness of her love trysts which Juliet invoked on her balcony; that celestial music which it attuned to human kisses, that eternal inspirer of all those languorous romances which open an ideal sky to all the poor little tender hearts of sensitive girls!

She was going to hear a nightingale.

"We must not make a noise," her companion said, "and then we can go into the wood, and sit down close beside it."

The boat seemed to glide. They saw the trees on the island, the banks of which were so low that they could look into the depths of the thickets. They stopped, he made the boat fast, Henriette took hold of Henri's arm, and they went beneath the trees.

"Stoop," he said, so she stooped down, and they went into an inextricable thicket of creepers, leaves and reed grass, which formed an undiscoverable retreat, and which the young man laughingly called "his private room."

Just above their heads, perched in one of the

trees which hid them, the bird was still singing. He uttered trills and roulades, and then loud, vibrating notes that filled the air and seemed to lose themselves on the horizon, across the level country, through that burning silence which weighed upon the whole landscape. They did not speak for fear of frightening it away. They were sitting close together, and, slowly, Henri's arm stole round the girl's waist and squeezed it gently. She took that daring hand without any anger, and kept removing it whenever he put it round her; without, however, feeling at all embarrassed by this caress, just as if it had been something quite natural, which she was resisting just as naturally.

She was listening to the bird in ecstasy. She felt an infinite longing for happiness, for some sudden demonstration of tenderness, for the revelation of superhuman poetry, and she felt such a softening at her heart, and relaxation of her nerves, that she began to cry, without knowing why. The young man was now straining her close to him, but she did not remove his arm; she did not think of it. Suddenly the nightingale stopped, and a voice called out in the distance:

"Henriette!"

"Do not reply," he said in a low voice; "you will drive the bird away."

But she had no idea of doing so, and they remained in the same position for some time. Madame Dufour had sat down somewhere or other, for from time to time they heard the stout lady break out into little bursts of laughter.

The girl was still crying; she was filled with strange sensations. Henri's head was on her shoul-

der, and suddenly he kissed her on the lips. She was surprised and angry, and, to avoid him, she stood up.

They were both very pale when they left their grassy retreat. The blue sky appeared to them clouded and the ardent sun darkened; and they felt the solitude and the silence. They walked rapidly, side by side, without speaking or touching each other, for they seemed to have become irreconcilable enemies, as if disgust and hatred had arisen between them, and from time to time Henriette called out: "Mamma!"

By and by they heard a noise behind a bush, and the stout lady appeared, looking rather confused, and her companion's face was wrinkled with smiles which he could not check.

Madame Dufour took his arm, and they returned to the boats, and Henri, who was ahead, walked in silence beside the young girl. At last they got back to Bézons. Monsieur Dufour, who was now sober, was waiting for them very impatiently, while the young man with the yellow hair was having a mouthful of something to eat before leaving the inn. The carriage was waiting in the yard, and the grandmother, who had already got in, was very frightened at the thought of being overtaken by night before they reached Paris, as the outskirts were not safe.

They all shook hands, and the Dufour family drove off.

"Good-by, until we meet again!" the oarsmen cried, and the answer they got was a sigh and a tear.

* * * * * * *

Two months later, as Henri was going along the Rue des Martyrs, he saw *Dufour, Ironmonger,* over a door, and so he went in, and saw the stout lady sitting at the counter. They recognized each other immediately, and after an interchange of polite greetings, he asked after them all.

"And how is Mademoiselle Henriette?" he inquired specially.

"Very well, thank you; she is married."

"Ah!" He felt a certain emotion, but said: "Whom did she marry?"

"That young man who accompanied us, you know; he has joined us in business."

"I remember him perfectly."

He was going out, feeling very unhappy, though scarcely knowing why, when madame called him back.

"And how is your friend?" she asked rather shyly.

"He is very well, thank you."

"Please give him our compliments, and beg him to come and call, when he is in the neighborhood."

She then added: "Tell him it will give me great pleasure."

"I will be sure to do so. Adieu!"

"Do not say that; come again very soon."

* * * * * * *

The next year, one very hot Sunday, all the details of that adventure, which Henri had never forgotten, suddenly came back to him so clearly that he returned alone to their room in the wood, and was overwhelmed with astonishment when he went in. She was sitting on the grass, looking very sad, while by her side, still in his shirt sleeves, the

young man with the yellow hair was sleeping soundly, like some animal.

She grew so pale when she saw Henri that at first he thought she was going to faint; then, however, they began to talk quite naturally. But when he told her that he was very fond of that spot, and went there frequently on Sundays to indulge in memories, she looked into his eyes for a long time.

"I, too, think of it," she replied.

"Come, my dear," her husband said, with a yawn. "I think it is time for us to be going."